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WILLIAM HAZLITT

**Essayist and Critic**





# WILLIAM HAZLITT

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*SELECTIONS FROM HIS WRITINGS*

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*With a Memoir, Biographical and Critical*

BY

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AUTHOR OF "MEMOIR AND RECOLLECTIONS OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON,"  
"THE BOOK-LOVER'S ENCHIRIDION," ETC. ETC.



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## P R E F A C E.

IN the following Selections from the writings of William Hazlitt, it has been my aim to present to the reader what is most characteristic of him as a Critic of Literature, and an Essayist on Life, Manners, and Art. The selection has been made with much care and deliberation, and after a life-long acquaintance with his works, which extend over a period of twenty-seven years (1805 to 1830), and number about thirty-five volumes.

The specimens selected include his remarks on, and general estimates of our greatest Poets, Dramatists, Novelists, and Essayists. Following these are given several of his best Essays on Men, Society, and Books, almost without abridgment, and from others the most striking pages. Among these will be found occasional passages illustrative of his individual experiences, hopes, aspirations, and disappointments, which will help the reader to understand his peculiar character. Among the essays given entire are, "My First Acquaintance with Poets," "On Persons one would wish to have seen," "On Living to Oneself," "On Going a Journey," and "On the Fear of Death." The essays "A Farewell to Essay-writing" and "The Sick-chamber" will be read with pathetic interest. The latter was written only a few weeks before his death, and has been unaccountably omitted from the collected edition of his principal writings. His carefully-drawn and searching estimate of Burke, as well as of his great antagonist, Fox, are reprinted without abridgment. Almost the whole of the admirable In-

roduction to the study of the Elizabethan Literature is given, in which he traces, with singular power, the causes which led to the remarkable awakening of genius and thought at that epoch of our history.

Of his criticisms on Painters and Painting a sufficient number of specimens are given to enable readers on this subject to form some idea of the treasures of subtle thought and insight awaiting them in the numerous papers which he contributed to this department of the Fine Arts. Never, up to his time, had there been given to the world such appreciative criticism of the works of the great painters, or such masterly estimates of their genius. His "Character of Hamlet" is given unabridged, being one of his most characteristic productions. Those who have studied Hazlitt, as revealed in his books, must come to the conclusion that in this ingenious and original paper, in which he theorizes on the character of Hamlet, he has drawn largely from within, and that his imaginary Dane is probably a reproduction of his own thoughts and feelings. As specimens of the remarkable versatility of his genius I have given his essays entitled "The Fight" and "On the Conduct of Life; or, Advice to a School-Boy" (his son). The latter is written with earnest feeling, and expressed in a simple and unadorned style. Any reader of the former, not knowing it to be Hazlitt's, would suppose it to have been penned by a skilful professional reporter of pugilistic combats. I have also given some extracts from his "Life of Napoleon"—a remarkable but unequal work—which show his philosophic insight into the causes of the French Revolution, as well as his powers of vivid description.

To those who may wish to go farther afield among the pleasant intellectual pasturages afforded by Hazlitt's voluminous writings, I may recommend the handy edition of his principal works in seven volumes (the "Life of Napoleon" is not included), published by Messrs. Bell & Sons, and a volume issued by Messrs. Reeves & Turner, containing exclusively his writings on the Fine Arts. This volume includes his excellent article on

The Fine Arts contributed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in 1824. Both of these collections are edited by Mr. W. C. Hazlitt. The seven volumes of reprints of his principal writings, just referred to, comprise seventeen of the thirty-five volumes which bear his name.

The character of Hazlitt is one of deep interest, and deserving of careful study: With all his faults, he was a man to be loved and honoured. He was wayward, perverse, wilful, at times unreasonable and splenetic—often in consequence of a sense of his own intellectual superiority, and an impatience of mediocre and inferior minds. But against these failings and infirmities of temper—which belonged to the accidents of his nature, not to its essence—must be set his tenderness of heart, his unselfishness, his sympathy with the suffering and oppressed, his candour towards opponents, his rectitude and honesty of mind and purpose. He was an ardent lover of truth and beauty, if ever one existed, and he never swerved from his fealty to the cause of liberty and human progress. The highest eulogium that could be bestowed upon him is contained in one brief sentence of his friend Talfourd's:—"He had as passionate a desire for truth, as others have for wealth, or power, or fame." He was, perhaps, the most hardly treated man of genius of his time, and when one takes into account the unmerited obloquy to which he was so long and systematically subjected, it is not surprising that his sensitive nature was wounded, his temper soured, and his mind often darkened by fits of misanthropy which, for a time, overclouded the characteristic qualities of a noble, generous, and most unselfish nature. Herein lies the excuse, if not the justification, of those outbursts of fierce invective which he occasionally launched against his unscrupulous traducers.

In the Introductory Memoir I have endeavoured to present Hazlitt in his habit as he lived, and as he was known and seen by his friends—passing over none of his frailties or errors, and not hesitating to use freely the recorded recollections of those who were most intimate with him. These I

have incorporated in my sketch, in order to add to the reality of the picture. The reader will thus be able to see, through many different eyes, as it were, something of his personality and surroundings. I would particularly direct the attention of my readers to what was said of him by his earliest, dearest, wisest, and most considerate friend, Charles Lamb ("Memoir," p. lvii.), whose beautiful words will live in our literature as one of the truest and most tender tributes ever paid by one man of genius to another.

Should the following selections from his writings inspire in some thoughtful minds a desire to become better acquainted with a remarkable writer, too little known to the present generation, I shall feel amply rewarded for my labour of love. I can promise such minds a store of instruction and delightful mental invigoration. There is no better reading to be found than is afforded by his works. So happy a power of inspiring enthusiasm for genius, and of stimulating intellectual sympathy, has been exhibited by very few writers either of this or the last century. He has the supreme art of putting himself *en rapport* with his reader. He communicates the interest he feels. In his flowing and vigorous style he lays open the often stubborn thought, as the sharp ploughshare the glebe. The reader is never perplexed by ideas imperfectly grasped, or by thoughts which the writer cannot clearly express. What has been well said of Macaulay by Mr. Cotter Morison—"that his thought is always within his reach, and is unfolded with complete mastery and ease to its utmost filament"—is equally applicable to Hazlitt.

ALEXANDER IRELAND.

SOUTHPORT, *June 1889.*

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# MEMOIR OF WILLIAM HAZLITT,

## BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL

THE father of the subject of this Memoir was William Hazlitt, of Shrone Hill, Tipperary, originally from the county of Antrim. He graduated at the University of Glasgow, where he was a contemporary of Adam Smith. About the year 1761 he joined the English Presbyterian body, and became a minister of that denomination. His first appointment was at Wisbeach, in Cambridgeshire, whither he went in 1764, at the age of twenty-seven. Two years later he married Grace Loftus, a farmer's daughter, who was twenty years old, very handsome, and also simple and good. The marriage took place upon his leaving Wisbeach for Marshfield, in Gloucestershire, where, in the following year, 1767, his eldest son, John, was born. A daughter, named Peggy, followed. He then left Marshfield for Maidstone, where more children were born, but none of them survived except the youngest. He was named William after his father, and lived to make the name illustrious. He was born in Mitre Lane, Maidstone, on the 10th of April 1778. His father, who knew Benjamin Franklin and corresponded with Dr. Priestley, left Maidstone when his youngest child was two years old, to take charge of a congregation of Unitarians at Bandon, in the county of Cork. In that town he was settled for three years. His sympathy with the Americans in their struggle for independence led him to exert himself in behalf of the American prisoners confined at Kinsale, near Bandon. On the conclusion of the war, he went with his family to America, reaching New York in May 1783. He was fifteen months in Philadelphia, preaching occasionally, and delivering in the winter a course of lectures on the Evidences of Christianity. He made a short stay at Boston, where he founded

the first Unitarian Church there, and declined the degree of D.D. In 1786-87 he returned to England, and settled as a Unitarian minister at Wem, in Shropshire. He was then in his fiftieth year. His son John, then about twenty years old, was beginning the world as a miniature-painter, and in 1788 had some of his works exhibited at the Royal Academy.

William, who was then a child of eight or nine, was educated at Wem under his father's roof, as well as in a neighbouring school. He was by all accounts a docile pupil. From his earliest boyhood his father had impressed upon his mind the great principles of moral and political truth and the duty of asserting the rights of his fellow-creatures. Some of his letters written to his father and brother when he was away from home on visits, as at Liverpool in 1790, indicate a studious, inquiring mind, with a religious tone of thought in them. In a letter written to his father from Liverpool when he was barely twelve years of age, he makes remarks which show a lively and shrewd observation of character. "Mrs. Barton asked us, as if she were afraid we would accept her invitation, if we would stay to tea . . . I had rather one would tell one to go out of the house than ask one to stay, and at the same time be trembling all over for fear one should take a slice of meat or a dish of tea with them . . . I spent a very agreeable day yesterday, as I read 160 pages of Priestley and heard two good sermons. . . . After I had sealed up my last letter to you, George asked me if I were glad the Test Act was not repealed. I told him, No. Then he asked me why; and I told him because I thought that all the people who are inhabitants of a country, of whatever sect or denomination, should have the same rights with others. But, says he, then they would try to get their religion established, or something to that purpose. Well, what if it should be so?"

Here is revealed the early dawning of his hatred of privilege and intolerance. It is evident that his boyhood was spent under happy influences. As a proof of this, here is a portion of his father's answer to the above letter, showing the excellent lessons which this unworldly man inculcated on his clever, eager, inquiring boy, who ever spoke of him in after years with the highest reverence and respect:—

"MY DEAR WILLIAM, . . . Your brother said that your letter to him was very long, very clever, and very entertaining. On Wednesday evening we had your letter, which was finished on the preceding Monday. The piety displayed in the first part of it was

a great refreshment to me ; continue to cherish those thoughts which then occupied your mind. Continue to be virtuous, and you will finally be that happy being whom you describe ; and, to this purpose, you have nothing more to do than to pursue that conduct which will always yield you the highest pleasures even in this present life. But he who once gives way to any known vice, in the very instant hazards his total depravity and total ruin. You must, therefore, fixedly resolve never, through any possible motives, to do anything which you believe to be wrong. This will be only resolving never to be miserable ; and this I rejoicingly expect will be the unwavering resolution of my William. Your conversation upon the Test Act did you honour. If we only think justly, we shall always easily foil all the advocates of tyranny. The inhospitable ladies whom you mention were perhaps treated by you with too great severity. We know not how people may be circumstanced at a particular moment, whose disposition is generally friendly. They may then happen to pass under a cloud which unfits them for social intercourse. We must see them more than once or twice to be able to form a tolerable judgment of their characters. I only wish to caution you against forming too hasty a judgment of characters, who can seldom be known at a single interview. . . . I am glad you employed the last Sunday so well ; and that the employment afforded you so much satisfaction. Nothing else can truly satisfy us but the acquisition of knowledge and virtue. May these blessings be yours more and more every day !”

Strange to say, his first literary production made its appearance when he was only thirteen. The occasion was this. The Birmingham mob, in an outburst of zeal for the supposed interests of the monarchy and the Christian religion, had burned the house of Dr. Priestley over his head, and had destroyed his valuable library. Fired by this insult to one who professed the religion in which he himself had been brought up, the boy wrote a letter to the editor of the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* on the subject. It is so remarkable a production for so young a writer, and so reveals his mental character and future opinions, that it is worth giving entire :—

“MR. WOOD,—’Tis really surprising that men—men, too, that aspire to the character of Christians—should seem to take such pleasure in endeavouring to load with infamy one of the best, one of the wisest, and one of the greatest of men.

“One of your late correspondents, under the signature of OTAEIZ, seems desirous of having Dr. Priestley in chains, and indeed would

not perhaps (from the gentleman's seemingly charitable disposition) be greatly averse to seeing him in the flames also. This is the Christian!

"This the mild spirit its great Master taught. Ah! Christianity, how art thou debased! How am I grieved to see that universal benevolence, that love to all mankind, that love even to our enemies, and that compassion for the failings of our fellow-men, that thou art contracted to promote, contracted and shrunk up within the narrow limits that prejudice and bigotry mark out. But to return;—supposing the gentleman's end to be intentionally good, supposing him indeed to desire all this, in order to extirpate the Doctor's supposedly impious and erroneous doctrines and promote the cause of truth; yet the means he would use are certainly wrong. For may I be allowed to remind him of this (which prejudice has hitherto apparently prevented him from seeing), that violence and force can never promote the cause of truth, but reason and argument or love, and whenever these fail, all other means are vain and ineffectual. And as the Doctor himself has said in his letter to the inhabitants of Birmingham, 'that if they destroyed him, ten others would arise, as able or abler than himself, and stand forth immediately to defend his principles; and that were these destroyed, an hundred would appear; for the God of truth will not suffer His cause to lie defenceless.'

"This letter of the Doctor's also, though it throughout breathes the pure and genuine spirit of Christianity, is, by another of your correspondents, charged with sedition and heresy; but indeed, if such sentiments as those which it contains be sedition and heresy, sedition and heresy would be an honour; for all their sedition is that fortitude that becomes the dignity of man and the character of Christian: and their heresy, Christianity: the whole letter, indeed, far from being seditious, is peaceable and charitable, and far from being heretical, that is, in the usual acceptance of the word, furnishing proofs of that resignation so worthy of himself. And to be sensible of this, 'tis only necessary that any one, laying aside prejudice, read the letter itself with candour. What or who, then, is free from the calumniating pen of malice—malice concealed, perhaps, under the specious disguise of religion and a love of truth?

"Religious persecution is the bane of all religion, and the friends of persecution are the worst enemies religion has; and of all persecutions, that of calumny is the most intolerable. Any other kind of persecution can affect our outward circumstances

only, our properties, our lives ; but this may affect our characters for ever. And this great man has not only had his goods spoiled, his habitation burned, and his life endangered, but is also calumniated, aspersed with the most malicious reflections, and charged with everything bad, for which a misrepresentation of the truth and prejudice can give the least pretence. And why all this ? To the shame of some one, let it be replied, merely on account of particular speculative opinions, and not anything scandalous, shameful, or criminal in his moral character. ‘Where I see,’ says the great and admirable Robinson, ‘a spirit of intolerance, I think I see the great Devil.’ And ’tis certainly the worst of devils. And here I shall conclude, staying only to remind your anti-Priestlian correspondents, that when they presume to attack the character of Dr. Priestley, they do not so much resemble the wren pecking at the eagle, as the owl attempting by the flap of her wings to hurl Mount Etna into the ocean ; and that while Dr. Priestley’s name ‘shall flourish in immortal youth,’ and his memory be respected and revered by posterity, prejudice no longer blinding the understandings of men, theirs will be forgotten in obscurity, or only remembered as the friends of bigotry and persecution, the most odious of all characters.

ΕΑΙΑΣΟΝ.”

While at Liverpool, young Hazlitt acquired some knowledge of French and music. Afterwards he continued to read with his father, but does not appear to have devoted much time to writing. His father had a strong desire to see his son a Dissenting minister ; but to this destination the youth had an invincible repugnance. In his fifteenth year, however, he was sent to the Unitarian College at Hackney, where he was placed under the tutorship of a Mr. Corrie, who is reported to have said of his pupil that “he found him rather backward in many of the ordinary points of learning, and in general of a dry and intractable understanding.” His mind was occupying itself with political and metaphysical ideas and projects. Philosophy gained more of his attention than Theology. In the ordinary routine of education for the Unitarian ministry, he was a backward student. His teacher found that this intractable pupil was not an idler, but that his head was full of arguments about the bounds of religious liberty, the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, and a project for a new theory of civil and criminal jurisprudence. The latter scheme of political rights and general jurisprudence was afterwards (1828) set forth by him in the form which



it takes in the *Literary Remains* (1836). Naturally enough, his father wished that he should abandon this desultory essay-writing and devote himself to the work of the College; but to the expression of this wish he replied with a dignified statement of his opinion that, "with respect to themes, he really thought them disserviceable than otherwise." How, when, and under what circumstances he quitted the Unitarian College is not recorded. It would seem, however, that he entirely abandoned the notion of entering the Unitarian ministry, and that he returned to his father's house at Wem.

It was at this time, 1798, when Hazlitt was twenty years old, that Coleridge, who was officiating at Shrewsbury for the Unitarian minister there, came over to Wem, according to the custom of courtesy among ministers, to pay a visit to the Rev. William Hazlitt. Young Hazlitt had already walked to Shrewsbury, through ten miles of mud, to hear him preach; and his recollections of what he then heard, and of Coleridge's visit to Wem a few days later, is too well known to be more than alluded to here. These recollections are given in his brilliant paper, entitled, "My First Acquaintance with Poets," which will be found *in extenso* in the present volume. Coleridge's brilliancy entirely captivated young Hazlitt, who was bitterly disappointed when, after three months' stay at Shrewsbury, Coleridge accepted Mr. Thomas Wedgwood's offer of an annuity of £150 to retire from the ministry, and devote himself to poetry and philosophy. This change did not break up their friendship. Coleridge invited the young thinker to visit him at Nether Stowey, in Somersetshire, where, some time later, he received him kindly, and took him to Alfoxden, two miles from Stowey, where Wordsworth was then living. The poet was then from home, but in a day or two after his return from Bristol, he called at Coleridge's cottage; and there it was that Hazlitt first saw Wordsworth face to face.

It was during this visit that Coleridge first encouraged young Hazlitt to write. The work he set himself to compose was *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*: being *An Argument in favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind*; but it was not published until eight years afterwards, viz., in 1805. Sir James Mackintosh pronounced it "a work of great ability." Hazlitt himself said of it, that it was "the only thing I ever piqued myself upon writing." It is remarkable as an instance of early development of the reasoning powers—the first rough draft or outline of the plan of the essay being made at the age of eighteen. The sale of the

book was small, and he never received any profit from it. A valuable friend made by him about this time was the Rev. Joseph Fawcett, who had a strong relish for all good literature, and for the catholicity of whose tastes he always expressed great admiration. "A heartier friend or honester critic I never coped withal. With him I passed some of the pleasantest days of my life. The conversations I had with him on subjects of taste and philosophy gave me a delight such as I can never feel again."

From 1798 to 1802 little is known of Hazlitt and his doings. He had for some time definitely abandoned the notion of entering the Unitarian ministry, but had not settled on any plan of life. His time seems to have been spent in reading and thinking, but without any fixed object. A career was, however, indispensable. The income of his father was wholly insufficient to support him in practical idleness, so that he began to cast about for some means of living. At this time, his elder brother John, who had become a painter, came forward with a suggestion that he should embrace the profession of painting. This notion was adopted, and in 1802 William took up his abode under his brother's roof, and began the study of art in earnest. In October of the same year he left England for Paris, where he continued his studies, occupying himself with copying some of the pictures in the Louvre. He remained four months in Paris, and during that time made copies and sketches from Titian, Guido, Raphael's Transfiguration, and Lana's Death of Clorinda—a kind of work for which he had sundry commissions from friends of his brother in London. He then returned to England, bringing with him, not merely his copies from the great masters, but a set of tastes and principles in art, very few of which he ever afterwards modified. Not long after his return, he made a professional tour in the North of England as a portrait-painter, and was not unsuccessful in obtaining sitters. Wordsworth sat to him, but Hazlitt, dissatisfied with his work, destroyed the portrait. During this tour he visited a family in Liverpool called Raiton, who were friends of his father's, and fell in love with an attractive daughter of the house, of whom he painted a miniature on ivory. The suit was not favoured by the young lady's family and the relations between the lovers were broken off. Somewhere about this time it is reported that he fell in love a second time—in this case, with a rustic beauty in Wordsworth's neighbourhood. According to Patmore, he narrowly escaped being ducked by the villagers for his unwelcome attentions. De Quincey reports that

Hazlitt was smitten by the charms of Dorothy Wordsworth, the poet's sister, but the story wants proof. At all events, if the passion ever existed, it came to nothing.

Among other portraits, he painted one of his father—which was a labour of love both to artist and sitter—a half-length of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and a head of Lear. One of his earliest attempts was the head of an old woman in deep shade, of which he makes mention in one of his essays. It was done after the manner of Rembrandt, and was said to have been a picture of considerable effect. He was a severe critic of his own performances, and his standard was a high one. He failed to satisfy his own aspirations and ideals, or to overcome the diffidence he felt in his own powers. He was often impatient with himself, and when he could not produce the effect he desired, he has been known to cut the canvas into ribbons. At last he decisively relinquished the pursuit he so much loved, and laid down his pencil for ever. It is difficult to say whether patience and perseverance would have overcome his difficulties. Northcote said he gave up the experiment too soon, and that he would have made a great painter had he devoted himself entirely to his art. Among the latest work from his hand was a portrait of his newly-made friend, Charles Lamb, in the dress of a Venetian senator. The discipline of this brief practice of art was no doubt of permanent advantage to him. It has been justly said that it made him better understand “the worth of beauty and the elements of character; his perception was quickened, his insight deepened, and his powers as an observer and analyst enlarged.” In connection with this phase of his life, his essays on “The Pleasure of Painting,” “On a Portrait by Vandyck,” “On a Landscape of Nicholas Poussin,” “Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England,” and his article “The Fine Arts,” are well worth reading.

In 1806 he published at his own expense a pamphlet entitled *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs; or Advice to a Patriot*. Although powerful in its language and breathing a warm spirit of freedom, it attracted little attention, and is now all but unknown. It is reprinted in the volume, containing “The Spirit of the Age” in Messrs. Bell & Sons’ edition of his chief works. In 1807 appeared *An Abridgment of The Light of Nature Revealed*, by Abraham Tucker, Esq., originally published in seven volumes, under the name of Edward Search, Esq. It was through the friendly offices of Charles Lamb (whose acquaintance he had about this time made through his brother John) that Johnson the publisher was induced to under-

take the issue of this work. In it the spirit of the seven volumes is felicitously condensed into one, in which are preserved entire all the singular turns of thought and striking illustrations of the original. "As to the pains and labour it has cost me, or the time I have devoted to it," he says, "I shall say nothing. However, if any one should be scrupulous on that head, I might answer, as Sir Joshua Reynolds is said to have done to some persons who cavilled at the price of a picture, and desired to know how long he had been doing it—'All my life'." In his "Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy," Sir James Mackintosh devotes a chapter to Tucker, and refers to Hazlitt's abridgment of it, and "his excellent preface to it." The learned Dr. Parr, who was a thorough master of the original work, said that he never could tell what had been omitted in the abridgment—a very happy compliment to the abridger. In the same year (1807) he issued a clever attempt to invalidate the theory of Malthus, under the title, *Reply to the Essay on Population by the Rev. T. R. Malthus. In a Series of Letters: to which are added Extracts from the Essay, with Notes.* This had been begun as a series of letters in a newspaper, and was advertised by Longman & Co. as in the press "by a person of eminence." He also gave to the world this year *The Eloquence of the British Senate; or Select Specimens from the Speeches of the most distinguished Parliamentary Speakers, from the beginning of the Reign of Charles I. to the present time; with Notes, Biographical, Critical, and Explanatory*, 2 vols. This was a piece of honest taskwork. The speeches are illustrated by powerfully drawn characters of some of the more prominent orators—especially those of more recent date—Chatham, Pitt, Burke, and Fox. These portraits were afterwards reprinted in his *Political Essays*, 1819.

It was at the house of his brother John, at 12 Rathbone Place, that Hazlitt first met Dr. Stoddart and his sister Sarah. Stoddart, who was then, like John Hazlitt, an extreme Liberal in politics, was appointed King's Advocate at Malta. In 1807 Hazlitt became engaged to Miss Stoddart, who was about thirty-two years of age, he being twenty-nine. She had been on the point of marriage several times, but the various matches had been broken off, generally on account of pecuniary reasons. Miss Stoddart seems to have been intimate with Mary Lamb, and those who are curious to know more about the former lady will find a number of letters from Mary to her friend in Mr. W. C. Hazlitt's Memoir of his grandfather. The marriage, after some preparations, in which he exhibited much

eccentricity, was solemnised on Sunday, 1st May 1808, at St. Andrew's, Holborn. The only persons present, besides the bride and bridegroom, were Dr. and Mrs. Stoddart, and Charles Lamb and his sister. The bride's property, which was worth about £120 per annum, had been, at her brother's instigation, and to Hazlitt's annoyance, settled upon herself. The ceremony over, they proceeded to the village of Winterslow, in Wiltshire, where Mrs. Hazlitt's little property was situated. They lived in a cottage which formed part of the property. Here Hazlitt prepared a work which appeared in 1810 under the following title—*A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue; for the use of Schools. In which the Genius of our Speech is especially attended to, and the Discoveries of Mr. Horne Tooke, and other Modern Writers on the Formation of Language are for the first time incorporated. To which is added a New Guide to the English Tongue, in a Letter to W. F. Mylius, author of the School Dictionary, by Edward Baldwin, Esq.* This work, although well received, was not a success. It never reached a second edition, and is now a bibliographical curiosity. It was afterwards abridged by Mr. Godwin, under the name of Baldwin. A critic of the day said, that although intended for the use of schools, "yet the advanced student would find in it much valuable information, the definitions being concise yet intelligible, the rules clear and important, and the examples selected perspicuous and appropriate." He also about this time prepared an abridgment into English of Bourgoing's "*Tableau de l'Espagne moderne*," but this was labour wasted, as no publisher would bring it out. It was never printed, and still remains in MS.

In January 1809 a son was born, who was named William, but he died when six months old. In the following autumn the Lambs paid a visit to the Hazlitts in Wiltshire, along with Martin Burney and Colonel Phillips. After a fashion which it is now difficult to understand, these guests appear to have paid for their board during their stay in Wiltshire. Hazlitt was about this time busy with a *Memoir of Holcroft*, which, however, did not appear until 1816, under the title *Memoirs of the late Thomas Holcroft, written by himself; and continued to the time of his Death, from his Diary, Notes, and other Papers.* The continuation is by Hazlitt. It was reprinted in 1852 in "*The Traveller's Library.*" The materials for this work had been confided to him by Holcroft's family. It was humorously nicknamed by Mary Lamb "*The Life Everlasting*," from the way in which it was perpetually talked about by friends interested in

Holcroft, and from the inordinate length of time during which it hung on hand. On 26th September 1811 another son was born. Like the first, he was named William, after his father and his grandfather. A few months afterwards the couple moved from Winterslow to London, where they settled down at No. 19 York Street, Westminster—a house which, according to tradition, had belonged to Milton, and which looked out upon one occupied by Jeremy Bentham. Hazlitt had no introductions, was shy, proud, and irritable, and had need, as Lamb hinted, of “something of a better temper,” if not of “a smother head of hair.” He had ability enough to set up a score of popular authors, and a warm heart, but he was wanting in that open manner which goes so far in the way of attracting and winning friends. He was then thirty-four years old. He had one or two intimates who understood and loved him—notably Charles Lamb and his sister. He began his London career by proposing to the Royal Institution to give a course of ten lectures on the English Philosophers and Metaphysicians. His name being in some repute, the offer was accepted. Some fragments of these lectures have been given in the volumes entitled *Literary Remains*. He also sought and obtained an engagement as a parliamentary reporter on the *Morning Chronicle*. He was not a good shorthand writer, and trusted much to his good memory. After a short experiment of this kind of life, he took to critical writing for the *Chronicle*, sometimes contributing political articles. Early in 1814 he succeeded Mr. Mudford as theatrical critic on that paper. His dramatic experiences commenced with Bannister. His great favourites were Kean and Miss Stephens, and he was an enthusiastic admirer of Mrs. Siddons. His connection with the *Chronicle* was not of long continuance. About this time he also wrote for the *Examiner* and the *Champion* newspapers. In 1814 Jeffrey asked him to write for the *Edinburgh Review*. His second article embodied a brilliant series of sketches of the English Novelists (including remarks on Cervantes and Le Sage), which he afterwards reproduced in his *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*. The reader will find this delightful paper in the selections following this Memoir. For some years his contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* were tolerably numerous. Altogether nineteen articles from his pen appeared in its pages, ranging from 1814 to 1830. His grandson gives a list of fourteen only. In a letter to *Notes and Queries*, March 1879, to which any reader curious in this matter is referred, I point out five additional articles, which may without doubt be attributed to him, one of them,

on "American Literature and Dr. Channing," of peculiar interest for reasons given in my communication.

Mr. W. C. Hazlitt\* in his Memoir of his grandfather refers to the establishment in York Street, Westminster, and to the domestic mismanagement and want of home comfort which characterised it. He gives a curious illustration of this, furnished by Haydon the artist, whom Hazlitt had invited to a christening entertainment. When Haydon arrived, Hazlitt was out endeavouring to find a parson, and his wife was sitting by the fire in a bedgown,—nothing ready for the guests, and everything wearing the appearance of neglect and indifference. The biographer, speaking of his grand-parents, says that "the marriage was certainly not one of choice (though it was in no way forced upon him), and the woman with whom he thus knit himself permanently was one of the least domestic of her sex. She was a lady of excellent disposition, an affectionate mother, and endowed with no ordinary intelligence and information. But for household economy she had not the slightest turn; and she was selfish, unsympathising, without an idea of management, and destitute of all taste in dress. She was fond of finery, but her finery was not always very congruous. A lady is living who recollects very well the first visit Mrs. Hazlitt paid to her family at Bayswater. It was a very wet day, and she had been to a *walking match*. She was dressed in a white muslin gown and black velvet spencer, and a leghorn hat with a white feather. Her clothes were perfectly saturated, and a complete change of things was necessary before she could sit down." With a wife of such "excellent disposition" and habits as the mistress of his household, it was not likely that the wayward and unmethodical Hazlitt could lead a very happy or comfortable life. Later on it will be seen how the union of this ill-matched pair ended.

Between January 1815 and January 1817 appeared a series of papers in the *Examiner* under the title, "The Round Table," which in the latter year were collected in two volumes, with some omissions and additions, and published under the title *The Round Table: A Collection of Essays on Literature, Men, and Manners*. It was proposed that this series of papers should be in the manner of the early periodical essayists the *Spectator* and *Tatler*. Twelve

\* Grandson of William Hazlitt, author of "Memoir of William Hazlitt," "History of the Origin and Rise of the Venetian Republic," "A Handbook of Early English Literature," "Mary and Charles Lamb, Their Poems, Letters and Remains," editor of "The Shakespeare Jest-Books," &c. &c.

of the essays were contributed by Leigh Hunt, and one by an anonymous writer. The rest were by Hazlitt. These papers are generally shorter than those he wrote later. They are distinguished by force of style and acuteness of observation, and deserve a place in the literature of the earlier portion of this century. They possess all the ease and unstudied variety of conversation.

In 1817 Hazlitt gave to the world his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. This work, although it professes to be dramatic criticism, is in reality a discourse on the philosophy of life and human nature, more suggestive than many approved treatises expressly devoted to that subject. It was very favourably criticised by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*, who considered it a work of originality and genius. "What we chiefly look for in such a work," says he, "is a fine sense of the beauties of the author, and an eloquent exposition of them: and all this, and more, we think may be found in the volume before us. There is nothing niggardly in his praises, and nothing affected in his raptures. He seems animated throughout with a full and hearty sympathy with the delight which his author should inspire, and pours himself gladly out in explanation of it, with a fluency and ardour, obviously much more akin to enthusiasm than affectation."

In 1818 his dramatic criticisms, contributed during the previous four years to the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Champion*, the *Examiner*, and the *Times*, were collected into a volume, under the title, *A View of the English Stage, or a Series of Dramatic Criticisms*. He had always been fond of the theatres, and frequented them to the last. His earliest admiration rested on Mrs. Siddons. He always held that she had touched the summit of perfection. "While the stage lasts," he used to say, "there never will be another Mrs. Siddons." One of the last essays he wrote, only a few months before his death, was called "The Free Admission," which is full of picturesque and striking thought. The finest criticisms in the above-named volume are those in which he illustrated the acting of Edmund Kean, whose matchless powers he recognised at once on the very first evening of his appearance, and whose reputation he did so much to establish, in spite of actors, managers, and critics. From that night he became the most devoted of Kean's supporters. "His dramatic criticisms," says Talfourd, "are more pregnant with fine thoughts on that bright epitome of human life than any other which ever were written. . . . He began to write with a rich fund of theatrical recollections; and except when Kean, or Miss



Stephens, or Liston supplied new and decided impulses, he did little more than draw upon this old treasury. The theatre to him was redolent of the past—of images of Mrs. Siddons, of Kemble, of Bannister, of Jordan, . . . but his habits of mind were unsuited to the ordinary duties of a theatrical critic. The players put him out. He could not, like Leigh Hunt, who gave theatrical criticism a place in modern literature, apply his graphic powers to the details of a performance, and make it interesting by the delicacy of his touch. . . . In just and picturesque criticism, Hunt has never been approached.”

In the same year (1818) he gave a series of eight lectures on the English Poets at the Surrey Institution. These were followed by two other courses, on the English Comic Writers in 1819, and on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth in 1821. With reference to his manner in lecturing, his friend Talfourd says that he was not eloquent in the true sense of the term ; for his thoughts were too weighty to be moved along by the shallow stream of feeling which an evening's excitement can rouse. He wrote all his lectures, and read them as they were written ; but his deep voice and earnest manner suited his matter well. He seemed to dig into his subject—and not in vain. In delivering his longer quotations, he had scarcely continuity enough for the versification of Shakespeare and Milton, “with linked sweetness long drawn out ;” but he gave Pope's brilliant satire and divine compliments, which are usually complete within the couplet, with an elegance and point which the poet himself would have felt as their highest praise. Talfourd mentions one or two instances in which he startled and shocked his audience with a fine audacity which put their prejudices and conventional feelings on edge. “When he read a well-known extract from Cowper, comparing a poor villager with Voltaire, and had pronounced the line ‘a truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew,’ they broke into a joyous shout of self-gratulation that they were so much wiser than a wicked Frenchman. When he passed by Mrs. Hannah More with observing that ‘she had written a great deal which he had never read,’ a voice gave expression to the general commiseration and surprise by calling out, ‘More pity for you !’ They were confounded at his reading, with more emphasis perhaps than discretion, Gay's epigrammatic lines on Sir Richard Blackmore, in which scriptural persons are freely hitched into rhyme ; but he went doggedly on to the end, and, by his perseverance, baffled those who, if he had acknowledged himself wrong by stopping, would have hissed him without mercy.

He once had an edifying advantage over them. He was enumerating the humanities which endeared Dr. Johnson to his mind, and, at the close of an agreeable catalogue, mentioned, as last and noblest, his carrying the poor victim of disease and dissipation on his back through Fleet Street—at which a titter arose from some, who were struck by the picture as ludicrous, and a murmur from others, who deemed the allusion unfit for ears polite. He paused for an instant, and then added in his sturdiest and most impressive manner, ‘An act which realises the parable of the good Samaritan,’ at which his moral and delicate hearers shrunk rebuked into deep silence.”

The first course of lectures was soon afterwards published, under the title, *Lectures on the English Poets, delivered at the Surrey Institution*, and was well received—a second edition appearing in the following year. The volume is perhaps one of the most generally interesting of his critical works. He handles his subject with great *gusto*, acuteness, and felicity of touch; you feel that much patient thinking must have been exercised by the writer before giving his final judgments on our great poets. Many of these judgments show a very delicate apprehension of the authors under notice, mingled with an exquisite sensitiveness to beauty of every kind, moral and material. The reader capable of enjoying an intellectual treat of a high order will linger over Reflections on Poetry in General, the Remarks on Shakespeare and Milton, and his account of the Rise and Progress of the Lake School of Poetry.

His *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* were delivered and published in the year following—1819. They include a great variety of interesting subjects—the comic poets and dramatists, the periodical essayists, the great novelists of the last century—Fielding, Smollet, Sterne and Richardson—as well as some of the modern writers of fiction, such as Scott and Godwin. The works of Hogarth also come under review. The reader may not agree with him in his estimate of Steele, whom he places above Addison, but he should carefully read the critic’s reasons for his opinion. In his criticism on Johnson there will be no difference of judgment. His remarks on the Congreve and Wycherley group of dramatists have been pronounced by Leigh Hunt almost equal to Lamb’s, leaving a truer impression respecting them, as well as containing the most detailed criticism on their individual plays. His opinions of Rabelais, Montaigne, Cervantes, and Le Sage, which occur in the lectures on the Essayists and Novelists, are among the good things in this volume.

In 1817 and 1818 he contributed articles to the *Champion*, the *Examiner*, and the *Yellow Dwarf*, a periodical started by Mr. John Hunt, which only lived a few months. Most of these articles were afterwards reprinted in his collected volumes. An Edinburgh magazine about this date contained some of his lucubrations—one of them being on the question “Whether Pope was a Poet.” In 1819 appeared *A Letter to William Gifford, Esq., from William Hazlitt, Esq.* It consists of eighty-seven pages, and exposes “the wretched cavillings, wilful falsehoods and omissions, and servile malignity” of the disgraceful articles in the *Quarterly Review* on his *Round Table*, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*, and *Lectures on the English Poets*. These attacks, as well as those in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, will be spoken of more fully in a subsequent page. Talfourd said that the latter portion of the *Letter to Gifford* was one of Hazlitt’s noblest effusions.

In 1819 was published *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*. It was Mr. Hone’s proposal to collect Hazlitt’s political writings from the columns of the *Morning Chronicle* and other journals, and he was the publisher of the volume. It was dedicated to John Hunt, one of the sturdiest and most independent of Liberals, and a man of the highest probity. The preface to this collection runs to a considerable length—thirty-six pages. His son says of it, that in his mind it is “the very finest and most manly exposition of high political principle that was ever put forth, and the whole of the volume breathes the noblest spirit of liberty and virtue.” His opening words are: “I am no politician, and still less can I be said to be a party man; but I have a hatred for tyranny, and a contempt for its tools; and this feeling I have expressed as often and as strongly as I could;” and a few pages farther on, after defining his principles and politics: “This is the only politics I know; the only patriotism I feel. The question with me is, whether I and all mankind are born slaves or free. That is the one thing necessary to know and to make good. The rest is *flocci, nauci, nihili, pili*. Secure this point, and all is safe; lose this, and all is lost.” It may be here mentioned that in this volume were reprinted Hazlitt’s estimates of the characters of Burke, Fox, Chatham, and Pitt, from *The Eloquence of the British Senate*.

One of the most important of Hazlitt’s works was published in 1821, viz., *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth, delivered at the Surrey Institution*. After a general introductory view of the subject, he criticises the dramatists and poets anterior to, contemporary with, and immediately succeeding

Shakespeare—Sir Philip Sydney's "Arcadia" and the works of Bacon, Sir Thomas Browne, and Jeremy Taylor, the Spirit of Ancient and Modern Literature, and the German drama contrasted with that of the Age of Elizabeth. This volume contains some of the best criticisms from his pen. They display more than his usual strength, acuteness, and animation, with less of his usual acerbities of temper. An American critic justly says that "his stern, sharp analysis pierces and probes the subject down through the surface to the centre; and it is exercised in a more kindly spirit than is common with him. He had a profound appreciation of the elder dramatists, though a less social feeling for them than Lamb; and their characteristic excellences drew from him some of his heartiest bursts of eloquent panegyric." From Hazlitt's criticisms and Lamb's "Specimens" the general reader will gain a more vivid notion of the intellectual era they commemorate than from any other sources except the originals themselves. The reader will find in the *Edinburgh Review* for 1820 an article on this volume from the pen of Talfourd, characterised by warm appreciation of the ability of Hazlitt, as well as by a discriminating judgment of his deficiencies and limitations. "He possesses one noble quality at least," says his critic, "for the office which he has chosen, in the intense admiration and love which he feels for the great authors on whose excellences he chiefly dwells. His relish for their beauties is so keen, that while he describes them, the pleasures which they impart become almost palpable to the sense. He introduces us almost corporeally into the presence of the great of old time. He draws aside the veil of Time with a hand tremulous with mingled delight and reverence, and descants, with kindling enthusiasm, on all the delicacies of that picture of genius which he discloses. His intense admiration of intellectual beauty seems always to sharpen his critical faculties. He perceives it, by a kind of intuitive power, how deeply soever it may be buried in rubbish, and separates it in a moment from all that would encumber or deform it." The introductory lecture is distinguished by a peculiar dignity and weight of style and observation, which makes it perhaps one of the best and most unexceptionable of his compositions. He shows that the general causes of that sudden and rich development of poetical feeling and of intellectual activity were mainly the mighty impulse given to thought by the Reformation, by the translation of the Bible, the discovery of the New World, and the new opening of the stores of classic lore. The translation of the Bible, he considers, was the chief influence in bringing about the great work. To use his own words, "It

threw open, by a secret spring, the rich treasures of religion and morality, which had been there locked up as in a shrine. It revealed the visions of the prophets, and conveyed the lessons of inspired teachers to the meanest of the people. . . . The Bible was thrown open to all ranks and conditions 'to run and read,' with its wonderful table of contents, from Genesis to the Revelation. . . . To leave more disputable points, and take only the more historical parts of the Old Testament or the moral sentiments of the New, there is nothing like them in the power of exciting awe and admiration or of riveting sympathy. . . . There is something in the character of Christ, too (leaving religious faith quite out of the question), of more sweetness and majesty, and more likely to work a change in the mind of man, by the contemplation of its idea alone, than any to be found in history, whether actual or feigned. His character is that of a sublime humanity, such as was never seen on earth before our race. There shone manifestly both in His words and actions, . . . in every act and word of His life, a grace, a mildness, a dignity and love, a patience and wisdom worthy of the Son of God. His whole life and being were imbued, steeped in the word *Charity*. . . . He taught the love of good for the sake of good, without regard to personal and remoter views, and made the affections of the heart the sole seat of morality, instead of the pride of the understanding or the sternness of the will. . . . He has done more to humanise the thoughts and tame the unruly passions than all who have tried to reform and benefit mankind."

Before leaving this work, I must relate a circumstance in connection with it recorded by his friend Mr. Procter (Barry Cornwall). He says, "He had a very quick perception of the beauties and defects of books. When he was about to write his 'Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth,' he knew little or nothing of the dramatists of that time, with the exception of Shakespeare. He spoke to Charles Lamb and to myself, who were supposed by many to be well acquainted with those ancient writers. I lent him about a dozen volumes, comprehending the finest of the old plays; and he then went down to Winterslow Hut, in Wiltshire, and after a stay of six weeks came back to London, fully impregnated with the subject, with his thoughts fully made up upon it, and with all his lectures written. And he then appeared to comprehend the character and merits of the old writers more thoroughly than any other person, although he had so lately entered upon the subject."

In 1820 was started a periodical called the *London Magazine*,

edited by Mr. John Scott, formerly editor of the *Champion*, a man of considerable ability and fine literary tastes, who secured as contributors some of the ablest writers of the day, among whom were Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, and Allan Cunningham, and a year or two later, Thomas Carlyle, whose "Life of Schiller" first appeared in its pages. Lamb's immortal "Essays of Elia" made their first appearance in this magazine. Hazlitt contributed to it about a dozen essays during the first two years of its existence. Two of these essays are included in the first volume of *Table-Talk, or Original Essays*, published in 1821. The others were afterwards included in another publication of Hazlitt's, called *The Plain Speaker*, which did not appear until some years later. A second volume of *Table-Talk* followed in 1822, and a second edition in 1824, with the additional title *Original Essays on Men and Manners*. Many of these essays were written at Winterslow Hut (spelled Hutt), a coaching-inn on the border of Salisbury Plain, to which he had been in the habit of resorting when he wished to get away from London.

This solitary and desolately situated inn will always be remembered with interest from the beautiful allusion to it in his *Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, when speaking of the old dramatists Decker and Webster. The passage will be found in the *Selections*, p. 181. It was his favourite haunt when he wished to secure that entire solitude and seclusion from the world which he found so favourable to thought and quiet literary work. It was here that he drew upon his recollections of books and pictures, recalling what he had observed of men and things, probing his own character unshrinkingly, and extracting an infinite amount of self-knowledge from his own infirmities. It was here he would wander for hours over the bare, bleak pasturages and among the scantily-wooded hollows, and get home to his inn, miles from any other habitation, and set down the thoughts that had come to him on his solitary rambles, making the whole evening hours his own for steady and continuous work. Prompted by a wish to see this memorable resort of Hazlitt's—a wish "subdued and cherished long"—the writer of this Memoir at last realised his desire, and on a beautiful spring day—May Day of the present year—found himself at Winterslow Hutt. It is on the old coach-road between London and Salisbury, and near the sixth milestone from that cathedral town. In the old days, before railways, the London coach stopped here to change horses, and the traveller could find good cheer and accommodation if required. Now it is a desolate place, fallen into decay,

and tenanted by a labouring man and his family, cultivating a small farm of some thirty acres and barely able to make a living out of it. In winter two or three weeks will sometimes elapse without even a beggar or tramp or cart passing the door. On the ground-floor, looking out upon a horse-pond, flanked by two old lime-trees, is a little parlour, which was the one probably used by Hazlitt as his sitting-room. At the other end of the house is a large empty room, formerly devoted to cock-fighting matches and singlestick combats, in which he who first brought blood from his adversary's head was pronounced victor. It was with a strange and eerie feeling that I contemplated this little parlour, and pictured to myself the many solitary evenings during which Hazlitt sat in it, enjoying copious libations of his favourite beverage, tea (for during the last fifteen years of his life he never tasted alcoholic drinks of any kind), perhaps reading "Tom Jones" for the tenth time, or enjoying one of Congreve's comedies, or Rousseau's "Confessions," or writing, in his large flowing hand, a dozen pages of the essay "On Persons one would Wish to have Seen," or "On Living to One's Self." One cannot imagine any retreat more consonant with the feelings of this lonely thinker, during one of his periods of seclusion, than the out-of-the-world place in which I stood. In winter-time it must have been desolate beyond description—on wild nights especially,—“heaven's chancel-vault” blind with sleet—the fierce wind sweeping down from the bare wolds around, and beating furiously against the doors and windows of the unsheltered hostelry.

The essays in *Table-Talk* contain much vigorous thinking, many fine bursts of eloquence, and tender reminiscences of past days and bygone moods of mind. It is almost invidious to point out particular papers, but I cannot refrain from naming—"On Going a Journey," "The Love of Life," "The Fear of Death," "On People with One Idea," "Why Distant Objects Please," "The Past and Future," "The Indian Jugglers." The essay "On Living to One's Self" is in his best manner, and is steeped in intense recollection of his past life. The author's own early aspirations and toils after eminence in art as a painter are gathered up and embalmed in his essay "On the Pleasures of Painting," which is full of pathos and tender beauty; the spirit of long-crushed hope breathes throughout its pages.

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funeral. About the same time, Mrs. Hazlitt the elder lost her mother, at the extreme age of ninety-nine. Her portrait was taken by John Hazlitt when she was ninety-six. The Rev. Mr. Hazlitt left four volumes of sermons. He was a correspondent of Dr. Priestley. His widow, born in 1746, lived to witness the accession of Queen Victoria. It is probable that Hazlitt had his good father in his mind when he wrote the striking passage, beginning, "But we have known some such in happier days," &c. (see Selections—"Dissenting Ministers," page 89.)

The reception by the press and the public of Hazlitt's productions during the previous few years was highly favourable. An exception, however, must be made in the case of *Blackwood's Magazine*, the *Quarterly Review* (then edited by Gifford), and some of the Government journals of the period, which attacked him with an animosity and unscrupulous malignity almost incredible to the present generation. His crime in the eyes of these writers was that he was an uncompromising reformer, and that in some of his political effusions he had exposed the abuses of the Government, denouncing things and systems to which he was conscientiously opposed in terms not to be mistaken. Granted that his political sympathies were ardent and the expression of them often vehement, and that he had taken the unfashionable side, wilfully placing himself from the first in collision with all the interests that were in the sunshine of the world, and with all the persons that were then all-powerful in England; surely the intrinsic ability of his purely literary works might have been acknowledged and their merits admitted. He himself never failed to do justice to the intellectual gifts of opponents, however keenly he may have attacked their political opinions and tergiversations. Witness what he always said of the genius of such men as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, and Scott. It is never without a sad feeling, akin to regret, that he attacks what he considers their backslidings, and launches against them his invective and sarcasm. But he never carried poisoned arrows into political conflict. In his bitterest remarks upon the changed opinions of Coleridge and Wordsworth, he makes you feel how much they were once rooted in his affection, and that, in spite of their differences, he can never cease to admire their genius. Such was his chivalrous sense of honour and justice. His example in this respect was not followed by his enemies and assailants. The merits of his works and the recognition of his literary powers were systematically ignored by the writers in the Government interest,



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and the author was deliberately held up to public odium and disgust. He was denounced as an incendiary, a Radical, a Bonapartist, a man of loose morals, and a Cockney scribbler, the friend and companion of Leigh Hunt, the editor of the *Examiner*, who was always attacking the Government—a man equally obnoxious and hateful. The object of this literary ruffianism was to disparage the writer and prevent the public from reading his works. These shameless attacks had the desired effect of blighting his credit with the publishers and seriously limiting the circulation of his books, and in one instance entirely stopping the sale of one of his works from the day on which the malignant article appeared. His friend Leigh Hunt was subjected to the same scandalous treatment, and with similar results. The public mind was in this way extensively poisoned with regard to these two writers and men of genius, thus causing a much tardier recognition of their merits in influential quarters than would otherwise have been the case. In order to justify the strong expressions used by me, it may be stated that I have carefully read the various articles referred to, and could, if necessary, produce a selection of passages which would stand unparalleled in the annals of criticism for their gross violation of the laws and decencies of literary warfare. To such lengths did party feeling go in those days! Let us rejoice that this style of criticism has gone by, never to return. The most violent political partisan of the present day would shrink from using such weapons. It is with pleasure I record the fact that the *Quarterly Review*, nearly fifty years after the date of these attacks, gave utterance, through the pen of Bulwer, to a most generous recognition of the genius of Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. It may also be stated, in justice to *Blackwood's Magazine*, that, fifteen years later, Wilson made the *amende honorable* to Hunt in a graceful and touching passage in one of the "Noctes," the concluding words of which were: "The animosities are mortal, the humanities live for ever." He even invited him to write for the Magazine; but Hunt declined the offer.

Mention has already been made of the want of sympathy between Hazlitt and his wife, and of the qualities and peculiarities in each which stood in the way of their domestic happiness. "Never," says his grandson, "was there a worse-matched pair. If they had not happened to marry, if they had continued to meet at the Lambs', as of old, or at her brother's, they would have remained probably the best of friends. She would have appreciated better his attainments and genius, . . . but there was a sheer want of sympathy

from the first set-out. They married after studying each other's characters very little, and observing very little how their tempers were likely to harmonise. . . . I believe that Mr. Hazlitt was physically incapable of giving his affections to a single object. . . . His wife had not much pretence for quarrelling with him on the ground of former attachments still lingering in his thoughts, and keeping his affections in a state of tangle, for she too had had her little love affairs, and accepted him only when her other suitors broke faith." This want of sympathy between them and alienation of feeling kept increasing, and their uncomfortable relations grew more and more distasteful to both. For some time they had been living apart—he often by himself at Winterslow Hutt, or in lodgings in town.

About this time (1822) he became the subject of a singular and infatuated attachment. He was violently smitten with the beauty of Sarah Walker, daughter of a tailor in Southampton Buildings, at whose house he lodged. It was a sort of frenzy of platonic devotion. Hazlitt was in a state of hallucination about her beauty and moral excellence. The amazing thing about it was that his insane enthusiasm so over-mastered him and carried him off his balance, that he could not help speaking about it to every one he knew. This unfortunate infatuation took entire possession of him, and he was completely carried away by it. He was really in a condition of mind in which he could scarcely be considered a responsible being. His son, in the biographical sketch prefixed to his father's "*Literary Remains*," speaks of the divorce of his father and mother, and refers to the painful incident of this infatuated attachment in the following sensible words:—"It was in 1823 that a circumstance occurred, the influence of which on my father's public as well as private life obliges me to advert to it, although other reference than a bare record of the fact is as unnecessary to the reader as it would be painful to me. About this period, then, my father and mother were divorced under the law of Scotland. Their union had for some years past failed to produce that mutual happiness which was its object, owing in great measure to an imagined and most unfounded idea on my father's part of a want of sympathy on that of my mother. For some time previous to this my father had fallen into an infatuation which he has himself illustrated in glowing and eloquent language in a regretted publication called '*Liber Amoris*.' The subject is a painful one, and admits of but one cheerful consolation—that my father's name

and character were but momentarily dimmed by what indeed was but a momentary delusion."

The book referred to appeared in 1823 under the title of *Liber Amoris, or the New Pygmalion*. In it he records his conversations with this imaginary goddess of his admiration, who in the eyes of every one but himself was a very common-place person. One of his critics spoke of the book as a most remarkable psychological curiosity, and one of the most signal examples extant of the power of a genuine passion, not merely to palliate what was wrong, but to dignify what was ridiculous. A lady critic says of this passage in Hazlitt's life, that "it is enough that no vicious or sensual man could have fallen into such fascination, nor any decently hypocritical one have proclaimed it." De Quincey called it "an explosion of frenzy. He threw out his clamorous anguish to the clouds, and to the winds, and to the air; caring not who might listen, who might sympathise, or who might sneer—the sole necessity for him was to empty his over-burdened spirit." A philosophical critic of the book calls it a novelty in the English language, and says that he is not aware of the publication of anything so vindictory of the ideal theory of Berkeley—nothing so approaching a demonstration that *mind is the great creator, and matter a fable*. Mrs. Jameson has a very eloquent passage on the subject in one of her volumes. The late Lord Houghton incidentally expressed his great admiration of the book in an article on Keats in the *Fortnightly Review*. Before leaving this painful subject, it will be well to give a few sentences from the pen of Bryan Waller Procter, better known by his *nom de plume* Barry Cornwall, who knew Hazlitt well, met him at this time, and who had seen the girl at his (H.'s) lodgings. "His intellect was completely subdued by an insane passion. He was, for a time, unable to think or talk of anything else. He abandoned criticism and books as idle matters, and fatigued every person whom he met by expressions of her love, of her deceit, and of his own vehement disappointment. This was when he lived in Southampton Buildings, Holborn. Upon one occasion I know that he told the story of his attachment to five different persons in the same day, and at each time entered into minute details of his love-story. 'I am a cursed fool,' said he to me. 'I saw J—— going into Wills' Coffee-house yesterday morning; he spoke to me. I followed him into the house, and whilst he lunched I told him the whole story. Then I wandered into the Regent's Park, where I met one of M——'s sons. I walked with him some time, and on his using

some civil expression, by Jove, sir, I told him the whole story !' [Here he mentioned another instance which I forget.] 'Well, sir' (he went on), 'I then went and called on Haydon, but he was out. There was only his man, Salmon, there ; but by Jove ! I could not help myself. It all came out ; the whole cursed story. Afterwards I went to look at some lodgings at Pimlico. The landlady at one place, after some explanations as to rent, &c., said to me very kindly, "I am afraid you are not well, sir ?" "No, ma'am," said I, "I am not well ;" and on inquiring further, the devil take me if I did not let out the whole story from beginning to end.' I used to see this girl, Sarah Walker, at his lodgings, and could not account for the extravagant passion of her admirer. She was the daughter of the lodging-house-keeper. Her face was round and small, and her eyes were motionless, glassy, and without any speculation (apparently) in them. Her movements in walking were very remarkable, for I never observed her to make a step. She went onwards in a sort of wavy, sinuous manner, like the movement of a snake. She was silent, or uttered monosyllables only, and was very demure. Her steady, unmoving gaze upon the person whom she was addressing was exceedingly unpleasant. The Germans would have extracted a romance from her, endowing her perhaps with some diabolic attribute. To this girl he gave all his valuable time, all his wealth of thought, and all the loving frenzy of his heart. For a time I think that on this point he was substantially insane—certainly beyond self-control. To him she was a being full of witchery, full of grace, with all the capacity of tenderness. The retiring coquetry, which had also brought others to her, invested her in his sight with the attractions of a divinity." I have not given any extracts from this work, as, from the nature of its contents, it would be impossible to convey a correct idea of it by detached passages.

With regard to the divorce mentioned by his son in the extract given above, both parties went to Edinburgh, swore that there was no collusion between them, and, after considerable delay, obtained their object. A detailed account of the whole transaction, including extracts from Mrs. Hazlitt's diary, is given in his grandson's Memoir. It is difficult to understand how the affair was carried through with so much coolness, and how husband and wife, so soon to be divorced, could meet as they did on terms of apparent friendship ; how they could drink tea together, arrange as to the payment of her expenses, and deal with each other, all through, as if the matter about which they had met in Edinburgh was one of the most ordinary and everyday character.

In 1822-23 five articles by Hazlitt appeared in the *Liberal*, a periodical started by Lord Byron and Shelley, and to which Leigh Hunt was also a contributor. It only extended to four numbers. Byron's "Vision of Judgment" and "Heaven and Earth, a Mystery," first appeared in it. Hazlitt's contributions were "My First Acquaintance with Poets," "Arguing in a Circle," "On the Scotch Character," "Pulpit Oratory—Chalmers and Irving," and "On the Spirit of Monarchy."

In 1823 he issued a little volume called *Characteristics in the Manner of Rochefoucauld's Maxims*. The book is less known than almost any of his writings. Mr. R. H. Horne, in his introductory remarks to the second edition (1837), says that it contains much that is cynical, though nothing malevolent. Some of his most bitter sarcasms are distinctly levelled at himself. In his most cutting truths it is a striking peculiarity with him that he always brings himself in for his full share. There is stuff alone in this little volume to make a reputation. To the latest edition of *Characteristics*, (1871), are added "Common-Places," reprinted from Hunt's *Literary Examiner* (1823), and "Trifles Light as Air" from the *Atlas* newspaper (1829).

In 1824 Mr. Hazlitt contributed to the seventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* an article on *The Fine Arts*, afterwards reprinted with the title *Painting and the Fine Arts, being the articles contributed under these heads to the seventh edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica*, by B. R. Haydon, Esq., and William Hazlitt, Esq. A critic writing on this essay says, that if he wished to give any young or uninstructed individual a correct and exalted idea of what is meant by the term "The Arts" or "The Fine Arts," he would simply place it in his hands. The whole tendency of the paper is to show that the perfection attained by all the great masters arose from the study of the nature which surrounded them, and not from that imagined improvement upon nature which has been called the ideal.

In the same year, 1824, appeared *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England, with a Criticism on "Marriage-à-la-Mode."* In no department of criticism did Hazlitt write with more insight, power, and picturesqueness than on painting and pictures. Leigh Hunt considered him the greatest critic on art that ever appeared ("his writings on that subject casting a light like a painted window"). Some of the opening sketches prefixed to his descriptions of the galleries of Dulwich, Stafford House, Burleigh, and

Blenheim are as charming as the best pictures they celebrate. The volume is full of beauties, although it seems to be written carelessly, and often in too dazzling language. The reader will find in it his account of the Cartoons of Raphael, of Rembrandt's picture of Joseph's Dream, his estimate of Holbein, of Poussin, and Watteau. His description of the Stafford Collection is prefaced by some striking observations on the duration of works of art. In his account of the pictures at Burleigh House there is a passage redolent with associations of the past, and embodying his recollections of a visit twenty years before, which may be pointed out as one of the most tender and eloquent he ever wrote. It is only one of several to be found in this volume. It may be here mentioned that a volume containing almost all that Hazlitt has written on the Fine Arts, including his sketches of the English Picture-Galleries, has been edited by his grandson, Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, and published by Messrs. Reeves & Turner.

Having got rid of his wife by divorce, according to the law of Scotland in those days, and having recovered from his mad infatuation for his lodging-house-keeper's daughter, who, it is almost superfluous to say, not long afterwards married a younger and less imaginative lover, he astonished his family and friends by very soon making a second marriage. In one of his many journeyings from and to London he made the acquaintance in a coach of a lady with some property, named Bridgwater. It is not reported how much time elapsed between the first meeting and their marriage, but the latter took place in the first half of 1824. In August of the same year they started on a trip to the Continent, during which his son, then a lad of about fourteen or fifteen, joined them. For some months they travelled about, visiting Paris, Turin, Florence, Rome, Venice, Milan, Geneva, and by the Rhine to Holland. During this tour he had opportunities of studying the Italian masters, and described them, as well as the places he visited, in a series of letters to the *Morning Chronicle*. He returned to London without his wife, who never afterwards rejoined him. Those who might be expected to give any information as to the cause of this abrupt termination of the brief period of his second married life are silent, and we are left to form our own conclusions. All we are told by Mr. W. C. Hazlitt is this : " Mr. Hazlitt and his son returned home alone. Mrs. Hazlitt had stopped behind. At the end of a fortnight he wrote to her, asking her when he should come to fetch her ; and the answer which he got was that she had proceeded to Switzerland with her



sister, and that they had parted for ever." A writer on Hazlitt—Mr. Saintsbury—says very justly of this matter, "When a man with such antecedents marries a woman of whom no one has anything bad to say, lives with her for a year, chiefly on her money, and is then quitted by her with the information that she will have nothing more to do with him, it is not, I think, uncharitable to conjecture that most of the fault is his."

The letters he wrote while on his journey were published the following year (1826) in a volume entitled *Notes of a Journey in France and Italy*. This memorial of travel is full of enjoyment, observation, and thought. His conversation was described by one who fell in with him on the journey as being better than any book on the art pictorial he had ever read. His local descriptions—the passage across the Alps, his sketches of Swiss and Italian scenery, of Rome, Venice, and the Italian cities—are conspicuous for their vividness. The productions of some of the great Italian masters are criticised with his usual skill and felicity. The opinions of a man so eminently qualified to judge in such matters were read with attention and interest. This volume has never been reprinted.

We get a glimpse of Hazlitt during this journey in a forgotten article in an early volume of *Fraser's Magazine* (March 1839). It is written by Captain Medwin, the friend and biographer of Shelley. The article is entitled "Hazlitt in Switzerland: A Conversation." Medwin, who does not tell us how he came to meet Hazlitt, begins by saying that he found him living in a cottage near Vevay, on the Lake of Geneva. He describes him as by no means striking in appearance, though not unprepossessing—his dress neglected, his face unshaven. His countenance bore the marks of intense application, and there was such a habitual expression of melancholy, as though he was brooding over past miseries or indulging in hopeless views of the future. His figure was emaciated and his vital energy apparently very low. His body seemed only a tenement for spirit. A conversation ensued, the substance of which is given in five or six pages. It was about Byron, Scott, Shakespeare, and other literary topics. At its conclusion he entered into a long history of his own literary wrongs, his neglect by the public, and his bitter persecution by the reviewers. The chord, thus touched, vibrated in every nerve, and he spoke for half an hour with much rapidity, and with an attempt at times to suppress his feelings, which was distressing to both. At last, working himself up into a fury, he poured

forth the fiercest diatribes against his assailants. Medwin tried to calm him, and then took his leave.

In 1824 he prepared a volume, *Selections from the English Poets*. In this he was assisted by Lamb and Procter. Some poets (chiefly living), whose works were copyright, were included in the collection. An injunction being threatened, the volume was withdrawn from sale. A few, however, got into circulation, one of which is in my possession. In its original form, it extended to 822 royal octavo double columns. It was issued in 1825 with a new title and frontispiece, and consisted of 562 pages, with his name on the title-page. The authors not included in the re-issue are Rogers, Campbell, Bloomfield, Crabbe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, Scott, Lamb, Montgomery, Byron, Moore, Hunt, Shelley, Thurlow, Keats, Milman, Bowles, and Barry Cornwall. The selections are preceded by brief, pithy, and comprehensive paragraphs, describing the characteristics of each poet. In his preface he says: "I have made it my aim to exhibit the characteristic and striking features of English poetry and English genius; and with this view have endeavoured to give such specimens from each author as showed his peculiar powers of mind, and the peculiar style in which he excelled."

In 1825 was published in one volume *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits*. This work is regarded by some of Hazlitt's critics as his best—the most matured in thought, the most impartial and deliberate in judgment, and the most finished in style. One calls it "The Harvest Home" of his mind; another says that in the delicate discrimination of the finer shades of character, and in those evanescent forms of expression which an inferior artist might in vain attempt to catch, he is the Clarendon of his age. He gives portraits of Coleridge, Scott, Wordsworth, Byron, Brougham, and a dozen more of his distinguished contemporaries, both political and literary. The portrait of Byron is a masterpiece of analysis of that poet's wayward genius and character. The character of Cobbett, considered by many of Hazlitt's admirers as one of the best pieces he ever wrote, and which originally appeared in *Table-Talk* in 1820, is not given in the first edition of *The Spirit of the Age*, but appears in the third, edited by his son, 1835, and in subsequent editions.

*The Plain-Speaker; Opinions on Books, Men, and Things*, 2 vols., 1826, was the next work which he gave to the public. These essays present a great variety of subjects discussed in Hazlitt's best manner. The titles of some of them have only to be named to whet the appetite of the reader. "Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers,"

"On Application to Study," "On Reading Old Books," "On People of Sense," "On Depth and Superficiality," "On Personal Character," "On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life," and many more. The volume includes the most of the articles he contributed to the *London Magazine* in 1820 and 1821. Talfourd has pronounced these as well as most his previous essays "to differ not so much in degree as in kind from that of all others of their class. There is a weight and substance about them which makes us feel that, amidst all their dexterous analysis, they are in no small measure creations. The quantity of thought which is accumulated upon his favourite subjects, the variety and richness of the illustrations, and the strong sense of beauty and pleasure which pervades and animates the composition, give them a place, if not above, yet apart from, the writings of all other essayists. They have not, indeed, the dramatic charm of the old *Spectator* and *Tatler*, nor the airy touch with which Addison and Steele skimmed along the surface of many-coloured life; but they disclose the subtle essence of character, and trace the secret springs of the affections, with a more learned and penetrating spirit of human dealing than either of these essayists."

The work above described was the last collection of essays given by Mr. Hazlitt to the public. His son afterwards gathered together and published two volumes of essays contributed to various periodicals, and not included in *Table-Talk* or *The Plain-Speaker*. They will be found indispensable companions to these collections. It is well, therefore, to give a brief account of these before proceeding to describe the last two works from his pen, his *Conversations with Northcote* and the *Life of Napoleon*. The two collections of essays referred to are entitled *Sketches and Essays, now first collected by his son*, 1839; *Winterslow; Essays and Characters, written there, collected by his son*, 1850. In these two volumes will be found his memorable paper, "My First Acquaintance with Poets" (which, in its complete form, first appeared in "The Liberal" in 1823), his brilliant record of a conversation at one of Lamb's evenings, under the title "Of Persons One would Wish to have Seen," and the touching essays entitled "On a Sun-Dial" and "A Farewell to Essay-Writing," written at Winterslow Hutt in 1828. There are also included his characters of Burke, Fox, Pitt, and Chatham, written in his earlier days, and reprinted from *The Eloquence of the British Senate*. Besides those named, there are twenty-seven other essays, each stamped with the mint-mark of his genius, and which will be welcome to all lovers

of English literature. Indeed, these two volumes include specimens of Hazlitt as an essayist at his very best. In them we recognise the familiar hand of the acute, wilful, unselfish, benevolent philosopher, his unfailing sympathy with mankind at large, doing justice to the good as well as bad sides of a question, and heartily relishing beauty and genius wherever he found them,—enemies not excepted. It may here be stated that in *Hazlitt's Literary Remains*, edited by his son, 1836, will be found several essays not included in either of the posthumous volumes named, nor in any of those published during Hazlitt's lifetime. Among these is the memorable article "The Fight," describing the pugilistic encounter between Hickman and Neate in 1822 with marvellous vividness, and with an apparent skill which would almost make one suppose that Hazlitt was an "old hand" in that line,—a professional describer of prize-fights for a sporting newspaper. I have been advised not to reprint this paper, but Hazlitt must be shown in every phase; an ardent admirer pronounces it his *chef-d'œuvre*.

In 1827 Hazlitt contributed an article to the *Examiner* entitled "The Dandy School." It was written soon after the appearance of "Vivian Grey" (not then published with Disraeli's name as author), about which the fashionable world was then in ecstasies of admiration. As this article has never been reprinted, it is deserving of notice here. In it he exposed the low aims of the novelist in his usual incisive style, indignantly protested against the degradation of the functions of literature by such writers as the author of "Vivian Grey" and Theodore Hook, and treated with wholesome scorn the views of life and society embodied in the adventures and conversations of their tuft-hunting heroes.

In 1826-27 a series of articles under the title of "Boswell Redivivus" appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*. These articles consist of a record of conversations with Mr. Northcote, the painter, then about eighty years of age, whom Hazlitt had known so far back as 1802 through his brother John. Northcote was a shrewd observer, and had seen and heard a great deal in the world of art and literature. He had great vivacity, plenty of anecdote, and many recollections of people whom he had known. These attractions drew Hazlitt frequently to his studio. He was generally considered an ill-conditioned, malevolent, and unamiable man, and it is rather singular that Hazlitt had so strong a relish for his society. He says: "The person whose doors I enter with most pleasure, and quit with the most regret, never did me the smallest favour. I once did

him an uncalled-for service, and we nearly quarrelled about it. If I were in the utmost distress, I should just as soon think of asking his assistance as of stopping a person on the highway. Practical benevolence is not his *forte*. . . . His hand is closed ; but what of that ? His eye is ever open, and reflects the universe. His silver accents, beautiful, venerable as his silver hairs, but not scantied, flow as a river. I never ate or drank in his house ; nor do I know or care how the flies or spiders fare in it, or whether a mouse can get a living. But I know that I can get there what I can get nowhere else—a welcome, as if one was expected to drop in just at that moment, a total absence of all respect of persons, and of airs of self-consequence, refined thoughts, made more striking by ease and simplicity of manner—the husk, the shell of humanity is left at the door, and the spirit, mellowed by time, resides within ! . . . I asked leave to write down one or two of these conversations ; he said I might if I thought it worth while ; ‘but,’ he said, ‘I do assure you that you overrate them. You have not lived long enough in society to be a judge.’ . . . I have generally taken him as my lay-figure or model, and worked upon it, *selon mon gré*, by fancying how he would express himself on any occasion, and making up a conversation according to this preconception in my mind. I have also introduced little incidental details that never happened ; thus, by lying, giving a greater air of truth to the scene—an art understood by most historians ! In a word, Mr. Northcote is only answerable for the wit, sense, and spirit there may be in these papers ; I take all the dulness, the impertinence, and malice upon myself. He has furnished the text. I fear I have often spoiled it by the commentary.” We are told by Mr. Patmore that in one of these conversations Hazlitt reported something which Northcote said should not have been printed. Northcote was furious, and spoke of Hazlitt as “the diabolical Hazlitt,” and wrote indignantly to the editor of the *New Monthly*, in which the articles were appearing. The editor replied that Hazlitt should never again write in the Magazine. Notwithstanding this explosion, they continued to meet as before, the latter taking notes with Northcote’s knowledge, and the conversations continuing to appear in the Magazine. These conversations contain much fine thought and practical wisdom ; many of the thoughts are strikingly original. The respective shares of author and artist are not always easy to determine. It was said by one critic of these conversations that all the ill-nature in the book is Northcote’s, and all, or almost all, the talent Hazlitt’s.

The work was not published in volume form until 1830. Its title is *Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.* In the same year was issued *The Life of Titian; with Anecdotes of the Distinguished Persons of his Time, by James Northcote, Esq., R.A.* Although this work bears the name of Mr. Northcote on its title-page, the material furnished by him was of a very unconnected kind, and only made available (with the addition of a great many notes) by Hazlitt's manipulation. To swell out the work into two volumes, a translation of Ticozzi's *Life of Titian*, by Hazlitt and his son, was introduced.

It now remains to speak of his last and largest work, *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, 4 vols. Vols. I. and II. 1828. Vols. III. and IV. 1830. New edition, revised by his son, 4 vols. 1852. This *Life* had loomed before his view for many years, and he meant it to be a monumental work. During 1827 he worked upon his cherished task at Winterslow Hutt. The first volume and the greater part of the second were finished and ready for printing, when he was taken ill, and had to return to London for medical advice. In the following year the first two volumes were issued, and the author went on perseveringly with the remaining two volumes. His strength was visibly declining, and he was anxious to complete his task. We are told that the finishing touches were put to the last two volumes under the roof of Mr. Whiting, the printer, of Beaufort House, in the Strand. The concluding volumes were sent forth to the public in 1830. The sale of the first two volumes had not been encouraging. Coming after Sir Walter Scott's work on the same subject was a serious disadvantage, and interfered with the success of the book. He was to have received £500 for the copyright, but his publisher's affairs became involved, and the result was that he received no recompense for this laboriously and conscientiously performed work. This led to a pecuniary crisis, disastrous in its issue to Hazlitt, bringing with it the greatest inconvenience and annoyance. His health and spirits suffered much under this misfortune. In the beginning of 1830 he removed to 6 Frith Street, Soho, and there he was threatened with a recurrence of his previous serious illness. The Preface, which he intended to appear at the commencement of the *Life*, was for some reason or other omitted, but it found a place at the beginning of the third volume—not standing by itself, but incorporated with and forming part of the text. He himself, writing about this Preface, says in a letter to Mr. Charles Cowden Clarke: "In Paris the Preface was thought a masterpiece, the best

and only possible defence of Buonaparte, and quite new *there*." Talfourd, in his "Thoughts upon the Intellectual Character of William Hazlitt," devotes several pages to an ingenious explanation of his admiration of Napoleon. One of Hazlitt's reasons for justifying this predilection to himself was no doubt the revolutionary origin of his hero, and the contempt with which he trampled upon the claims of legitimacy and humbled the pride of kings; but Talfourd points out other reasons, arising from the constitution of Hazlitt's mind, which help us to understand this idolatrous worship. He does not speak with unqualified admiration of the work. He considers it as often confused and spiritless, although "redeemed by scattered thoughts of true originality and depth," and descriptions, "written with a master's hand," such as that of the disastrous retreat from Moscow. At times "the author's strength becomes concentrated, his narrative assumes an epic dignity and fervour, and glows with 'the long-resounding march and energy divine.'" Mr. Fonblanque, one of the most acute of our political writers, and whose judgments are always characterised by discrimination and fairness, in a review of this work in the *Examiner*, says, "With respect to the narrative, it is rapid, spontaneous, and abounding with the mental touches which so peculiarly distinguish this writer; although it certainly wants something of form and due digestion regarded as the record of a series of great actions and important events. To Napoleon, as a man of commanding intellect, Mr. Hazlitt will, by some, be considered too favourable. It is much to say, however, that in no instance does he spare him when either his grand characteristics or his passions bring him into opposition to the great cause of liberty or the general benefit of mankind. . . . There is a noble and eloquent exposition of the inevitable results of a free press, which is admirably demonstrative of the utter inability, from the constitution and nature of the human mind, of an eternal resistance on the part of oppression and tyranny to the operation of the interchange of ideas which it produces. . . . We will venture to assert that this work displays a deeper insight into the sources and principles of morals and politics, in brief, rapid, and lightning glances—often as it were *en passant*—than nine out of ten of the formal treatises which are regarded as profound authority. We would rather, for instance, be the author of the remarks therein on the character of Robespierre and the Reign of Terror, than of the whole of Burke's great and high-wrought work."

Before concluding the record of Hazlitt's works, I may direct

attention to two papers of his, hitherto unreprinted, which appeared the year after his death. They may be of interest to those who wish to know his opinion on the subjects discussed, viz., "The Punishment of Death" and "The Emancipation of the Jews." The latter will be found in the *Tatler*, March 28, 1831, and the former in *Fraser's Magazine*, January 1831. I may also add that two articles from his pen were written a few months before his death, and appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*. They were entitled "The Free Admission" and "The Sick Chamber." The latter will be found in the following Selections; they have not been included in any of the volumes of his collected Essays.

Pecuniary anxieties and disappointments bore heavily upon him during 1830, and he grew gradually feebler. The stirring events in France in July of that year seemed to give him new life for a while, and came to him in his shattered condition like a sudden and unexpected gleam of sunshine. By the tender care of some of his friends he seemed to rally slightly at times, but in the course of the summer he grew weaker and worse. Still he was able to think and write a little. His grandson tells us that he composed a paper on "Personal Politics," in view of the then recent deposition of Charles X. and the overthrow of the Bourbon dynasty. It was something to have lived to see *that*. "I saw him (once only)," says his friend Procter, "as he lay, ghastly, shrunk, and helpless, on the bed from which he never afterwards rose. His mind seemed to have weathered all the danger of extreme sickness, and to be safe and as strong as ever. But the physical portion had endured sad decay. He could not lift his hand from the coverlet; and his voice was changed, and diminished to a hoarse whistle, resembling the faint scream that I have heard from birds. I never was so sensible of the power of Death before." All through the month of August he was struggling with death. He seemed to live on "by a pure act of volition." He asked those who were with him to fetch his mother to him, that he might see her once more before he died. But this was impossible; she was in Devonshire and eighty-four years of age. His old and ever-dear friend, Charles Lamb, was beside him at the close, on the 18th of September. The end was so peaceful, that his son, who was sitting by his bedside, did not know that he had passed away till the breathing had ceased for a moment or two. The last words he uttered were, "Well, I've had a happy life." Let it be recorded to the honour of Francis Jeffrey that he sent Hazlitt £50, in reply to an application made from his



sick-bed, but the kind gift did not arrive until after his death. Mr. R. H. Horne says that those who nursed him and cared for him during his last illness were Charles Lamb, Mr. Patmore (father of the poet), and Mr. Basil Montagu. "I brought an Italian artist, who took an admirable plaster cast from Hazlitt's face and the upper part of his head. The countenance was grandly taken. It had a latent smile, not unlike that which gradually dawns upon one after gazing for a time at some faces of the Egyptian sculptures." Wells, the author of "*Joseph and his Brethren*," went with Horne to see the body. He had at one time been intimate with Hazlitt. He afterwards raised a tablet to his memory in the Church of St. Anne's, Soho, where he lies buried. The inscription on the tablet is a long one, and will be found in the "*Literary Remains*."

"When Hazlitt died," said Bulwer, "he left no successor ; others may equal him, but none resemble. I confess that few deaths of the great writers of my time ever affected me more painfully than his. For of most of those who, with no inferior genius, have gone before him, it may be said that in their lives they tasted the sweets of their immortality, they had their consolations of glory ; and if fame can atone for the shattered nerve, the jaded spirit, the wearied heart of those 'who scorn delight and live laborious days,' verily they have their reward. But Hazlitt went down to the dust without having won the crown for which he so bravely struggled ; his reputation, great amongst limited circles, was still questionable to the world. He who had done so much for the propagation of thought, from whose wealth so many had filled their coffers, left no stir on the surface from which he sank to the abyss. . . . A great man sinking amidst the twilight of his own renown, after a brilliant and unclouded race, if a solemn, is an inspiring and elating influence. But Nature has no sight more sad and cheerless than the sun of a genius which the clouds have so long and drearily overcast, that there are few to mourn and miss the luminary when it sinks from the horizon."

#### HAZLITT AS A CRITIC AND ESSAYIST.

As a critic and essayist, Hazlitt takes a deservedly high place in English literature. His writings bear upon them the impress of a vigorous and original genius. They are characterised by genuine eloquence and fine perception of every kind of beauty, by sincerity and earnestness, and for the most part, when disturbing influences

were not present, by an unerring critical judgment ; and at times his page sparkles with epigrammatic brilliancy. His thoughts are expressed in vigorous, idiomatic, vivid, easy-flowing language. It is to be regretted that so few readers of the present day are acquainted with his works. There are several reasons for this. One of these reasons—upon which I have enlarged in the previous part of this Memoir—is the hostility directed against him during his lifetime by an influential class of critics, who were at the head of powerful literary organs on the Government side of politics. Hazlitt was an uncompromising politician. He was on the popular side, and evinced the most strenuous opposition to the existing Governments, at home and abroad. His thorough integrity, his denunciation of corruption and official servility, and his unswerving consistency, rendered him an object of hatred to the supporters of “things as they are ;” and led to those personal attacks upon his works and literary character which undoubtedly injured his popularity as an author, and left behind them influences and prejudices which have not yet altogether ceased to act unfavourably upon his reputation. Another cause which has diminished his influence is the voluminousness of his writings. An author who has left so much behind him is at a disadvantage compared with one of equal power whose works are contained within a moderate compass. For twenty years he was constantly writing for his livelihood, and thus often compelled to the act of composition when his health and surroundings were anything but favourable to thought. His consciousness of intellectual power, assisted by unusual command of language, induced him to draw continually on his mental resources, leading in some of his writings to repetition, and to a certain egotistical tone, which his enemies knew how to turn to his disadvantage, and for which the ability and originality of other portions were not allowed to atone.

Hazlitt's writings abound in acute and eloquently expressed opinions on literature, art, life, and manners. No critic so thoroughly imparts to his readers the sense of his own enjoyment of genius, as well as reveals the process of it with such success. His critical judgments are sometimes warped by personal and political prejudices ; but, with all their drawbacks, there are none superior to his in vigour and general truthfulness. Even when his judgments are at fault, they are hardly calculated to mislead the taste of the reader, from the ease with which it is perceived and referred to its source in caprice or a momentary fit of spleen. Hazlitt

infused an entirely new spirit into the criticism of his day. He showed that the way to comprehend a work was to enjoy it, and that just perception is closely allied to sympathy. If we trace the history of English criticism, we shall find that Hazlitt began a new era ; and whatever may be our opinion of his estimates of individual writers and artists, it must be allowed that his way of treating their productions—that is, sympathisingly, and not merely in a conventional or prescriptive manner—is a great advance upon the previous methods of treatment. The word “critical” hardly conveys a true idea of his mode of dealing with the works and genius of great writers. It is a kind of treatment which had never before been attempted, or even dreamed of. It has been described as not so much an art cultivated, as a new and beautiful sphere of literature created, ministering wholly to refined enjoyment. He is less a writer than an illustrator, and less an illustrator than an enthusiastic expositor and panegyrist, whose eulogium is the spontaneous overflow of an exquisite perception of, and an intense sympathy with, the beauties on which he expatiates. His appreciation of literature and art was more earnest, suggestive, and discriminating than that of any critic of his time or before him ; while his style was calculated to rivet attention by its remarkable clearness, fluency, and vigour, its warmth and richness of colouring. His knowledge of the fine arts, the drama, works of fancy and fiction, and other departments of literature, taken severally, may not equal that of some other writers, but taken altogether, is certainly unrivalled. His works are full of spirit and vivacity, and there is at the same time an intensity and vividness of conception which embodies ideas that are so volatile and fugitive as to escape the grasp of a slower, though even profounder intellect. He professes to throw aside the conventional formality of authorship, and to give his thoughts to the world with the freedom and frankness of Montaigne. He has fine sensibility, great imaginative power, remarkable acuteness of intellect, and a masterly gift of expression. His beauties are procured by a great expenditure of thinking, and some of his single strokes and flashes reveal more to the reader’s understanding than whole pages of an ordinary author. He is one of the most suggestive of writers. There are few who make their readers think so much, and he is constantly putting us on the track of speculation or intellectual sympathy. He makes life interesting by hinting to us its latent significance, and he reveals the mysterious charm of character by analysing its elements and probing its inmost depth. Seldom have the inmost

experiences of an author been more completely revealed than in the case of Hazlitt. There are few salient points and startling passages in his life that he has omitted to look upon or glance at in his Essays. The processes and impressions of his own mind had such an interest for him, that he feels a delight in recording them and speculating on them. In treating of a work of art or a favourite author, he brought to bear on their interpretation all the sympathetic insight born of his own experience. He makes us acquainted with all his tastes and antipathies, his prejudices and passions. He reveals his errors and weaknesses, and is anything but a self-laudator. Indeed, authorship was to him a kind of confessional. It has been remarked that some of his best essays may be said to be in a sense autobiographical, because in them he recalls his enthusiasms and the passionate hopes on which he fed his spirit. Some of these apostrophes and references to his past life are not to be matched for tenderness and sad regret by anything in the range of literature. An American critic, alluding to this peculiarity of Hazlitt's—his indulgence in retrospective thought and self-revelation—says, "He was an epicurean in this regard, delighting to renew the vivid experience of the past by the glow of deliberate reminiscence, and to associate his best moods for work and his most genial studies with natural scenery and physical comfort. No writer ever more delicately fused sensation and sentiment, or drew from sunshine, fireside, landscape, air, viands, and vagabondage more delectable adjuncts."

The extreme wilfulness of his character often led him into the indulgence of strong prejudices and induced a fondness for paradox; but even his paradoxes often serve as admirable stimulants to thought. In an unprinted essay of his in a newspaper in 1828, "On the Causes of Popular Opinion," he explains his love of paradox in this way: "All abstract reasoning is in extremes, or only takes up one view of a question, or what is called the principle of the thing; and if you want to give this popularity and effect, you are in danger of running into extravagance and hyperbole. I have had to bring out some obscure distinction, or to combat some strong prejudice, and in doing this with all my might, may have often overshot the mark. It was easy to correct the excess of truth afterwards."

He possessed a deep and earnest feeling for truth, which was indeed the guiding-star of all his thoughts and speculations. No truer words were ever spoken of him than those of Talfourd

when he says that "he had as passionate a desire for truth as others have for wealth, or power, or fame." His purpose was always pure and earnest, and no temptation could induce him to pervert or to conceal the faith that was in him. One of the most profitable results accruing from his critical writings is the intellectual zeal which they communicate, sending us to the writers on whom he is discoursing with a whetted appetite, eager to relish their beauties. So keen is his enjoyment of every trait of beauty and truth in literature and in life which forcibly strikes his imagination, so warm the feeling that pervades his thought, and so rich the colouring in which the thought is invested, that he at once makes captive our sympathies, and compels us "by his so potent art" to join in his admiration. One remarkable peculiarity in his writings is his love of quotation, which is always just, striking, and unmistakably felicitous. Emerson says, "We are as much informed of a writer's genius by what he selects as by what he originates. We read the quotation with his eyes, and find a new and fervent sense." Some of Hazlitt's essays were so studded with rich gems of thought, that the pages shine like cloth of gold. To the charges made by some of his critics that he was inconsistent, that he had a narrow range of ideas and repeated himself, and that he made personal attacks on his friends, he gives the following answer in a newspaper article which has never been reprinted:—"I have been accused of inconsistency for writing an essay, for instance, on the Advantages of Pedantry, and another on the Ignorance of the Learned, as if ignorance had not its comforts as well as knowledge. The personalities I have fallen into have never been gratuitous. If I have sacrificed my friends, it has always been to a theory. I have been found fault with for repeating myself, and for a narrow range of ideas. To a want of general reading I plead guilty, and am sorry for it; but perhaps if I had read more, I might have thought less. As to my barrenness of invention, I have at least glanced over a number of subjects—painting, poetry, prose, plays, politics, parliamentary speakers, metaphysical lore, books, men and things. There is some point, some fancy, some feeling, some taste, shown in treating of these. Which of my conclusions have been reversed? Is it what I said ten years ago of the Bourbons, which raised the war-whoop against me? Surely all the world are of that opinion now. I have then given proof of some talent, and of more honesty; if there is haste or want of method, there is no common-place, nor a line that licks the dust; and if I do not appear to more advantage,

I at least appear such as I am. . . . I hope to be acquitted of an absolute dearth of resources, and want of versatility in the direction of my studies."

#### HAZLITT'S PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.

We have one or two descriptive accounts of Hazlitt by friends which enable us to form some notion of his personal appearance and ways. Talfourd describes him to have been "of the middle size, with a handsome and eager countenance, worn by sickness and thought, and dark hair, which had curled stiffly over the temples, and was only of late years sprinkled with grey. His gait was slouching and awkward, and his dress neglected; but when he began to talk, he could not be mistaken for a common man. In the company of persons with whom he was not familiar his bashfulness was painful; but when he became entirely at ease, and entered on a favourite topic, no one's conversation was ever more delightful. He did not talk for effect, to dazzle, or surprise, or annoy, but with the most simple and honest desire to make his view of the subject entirely apprehended by his hearer. There was sometimes an obvious struggle to do this to his own satisfaction; he seemed labouring to drag his thought to light from its deep lurking-place; and, with modest distrust of that power of expression which he had found so late in life, he often betrayed a fear that he had failed to make himself understood, and recurred to the subject again and again, that he might be assured he had succeeded. In argument he was candid and liberal; there was nothing about him pragmatical or exclusive." For many years previous to his death he abstained entirely from the use of alcoholic liquors, having found indulgence in them to be injurious to his health. We are told that the cheerfulness with which he made this resolution and adhered to it was one of the most amiable traits in his character. To give Talfourd's words, "He had no censure for others, who, with the same motive, were less wise or less resolute; nor did he think he had earned, by his own constancy, any right to intrude advice. . . . He avowed that he yielded to necessity; and instead of avoiding the sight of that which he could no longer taste, he was seldom so happy as when he sat with friends at their wine, participating in the sociality of the time, and renewing his own past enjoyment in that of his companions, without regret and without

envy. . . . In society, as in politics, he was no flincher. He loved 'to hear the chimes at midnight,' without considering them as a summons to rise. At these seasons, when in his happiest mood, he used to dwell on the conversational powers of his friends, and live over again the delightful hours he had passed with them, repeat the pregnant puns that one had made, tell over again a story with which another had convulsed the room, or expand in the eloquence of a third ; always best pleased when he could detect some talent which was unregarded by the world, and giving alike to the celebrated and the unknown due honour."

Mr. Bryan Waller Procter (Barry Cornwall) saw a great deal of Hazlitt during the last twelve or thirteen years of his life, and has left on record his impressions of him. He first met him at supper at Leigh Hunt's. He expected to find a severe, defiant-looking being, instead of which he met a grave man, diffident, almost awkward in manner, whose appearance did not impress him with much respect. "He had a quick restless eye, however, which opened eagerly when any good or bright observation was made ; and he found at the conclusion of the evening, that when any question arose, the most sensible reply always came from him. He had nothing that was parsimonious or mean in his character, and never thought of eating or drinking except when hunger or thirst reminded him of these wants. With the exception of a very rare dinner or supper with a friend or intimate, his time was generally spent alone. After a late breakfast he took his quire of foolscap paper, and commenced writing, in a large hand, almost as large as text, his day's work. There never was any rough draft or copy. He wrote readily—not very swiftly, but easily, as if he had made up his mind ; and this was the manuscript that went to the printer. He was of the middle size, with eager, expressive eyes ; near which his black hair, sprinkled sparsely with grey, curled round in a wiry, resolute manner. His grey eyes, not remarkable in colour, expanded into great expression when occasion demanded it. Being very shy, however, they often evaded your steadfast look. They never (as has been asserted by some one) had a sinister expression ; but they sometimes flamed with indignant glances, when their owner was moved to anger ; like the eyes of other angry men. At home his style of dress (or undress) was perhaps slovenly, because there was no one to please ; but he always presented a very clean and neat appearance when he went abroad. His mode of walking was loose, weak, and unsteady, although his arms displayed strength, which he used to put forth when he played at

rackets with Martin Burney and others. He played in the old Fives Court (now pulled down), and occasionally exhibited impatience when the game went against him. The whole of many, and the half of more days, were consumed in this amusement. It was here that he witnessed the play at fives of the celebrated John Kavanagh, of whom he has written an account—at once an eulogy and an epitaph."

Mr. P. G. Patmore, who knew Hazlitt during the last sixteen or seventeen years of his life, devotes a large portion of the three volumes called "*My Friends and Acquaintances*" to recollections of him. From these the following sentences are taken :—"For depth, force, and variety of intellectual expression, a finer head and face than Hazlitt's were never seen. I speak of them when his countenance was not dimmed and obscured by illness, or clouded and deformed by those fearful indications of internal passion which he never even attempted to conceal. The expression of his face, when anything was said that seriously offended him, or when any peculiarly painful recollection passed across his mind, was truly awful—more so than can be conceived as within the capacity of the human countenance ; except perhaps by those who have witnessed Edmund Kean's last scene of *Sir Giles Overreach* from the front of the pit. But when he was in good health, and in a tolerable humour with himself and the world, his face was more truly and entirely answerable to the intellect that spoke through it than any other I ever saw, either in life or on canvas ; and its crowning portion, the brow and forehead, was, to my thinking, quite unequalled for mingled capacity and beauty. . . . The forehead, as I have hinted, was magnificent ; the nose precisely that (combining strength with lightness and elegance) which physiognomists have assigned as evidence of a fine and highly cultivated taste ; though there was a peculiar character about the nostrils, like that observable in those of a fiery and unruly horse. The mouth, from its ever-changing form and character, could scarcely be described, except as to its astonishingly varied power of expression, which was equal to, and greatly resembled, that of Edmund Kean. . . . He always lived (during the period of my intimacy with him) in furnished lodgings. . . . He usually rose at from one to two o'clock in the day—scarcely ever before twelve ; and, if he had no work in hand, he would sit over his breakfast (of excessively strong black tea and a toasted French roll) till four or five in the afternoon—silent, motionless, and self-absorbed, as a Turk over his opium-pouch ; for tea served him precisely in this capacity. It was the only stimulant he ever took, and



at the same time the only luxury ; the delicate state of his digestive organs prevented him from tasting any fermented liquors, or touching any food but beef or mutton, or poultry or game. . . . A cup of his tea (if you happened to come in for the first brewage of it) was a peculiar thing ; I have never tasted anything like it. He always made it himself, using with it a great quantity of sugar and cream. To judge from its occasional effects upon myself, I should say that the quantity he drank of this tea produced ultimately a most injurious effect upon him. . . . His breakfast and tea were frequently the only meals that he took till late at night, when he usually ate a hearty supper of hot meat. This he invariably took at a tavern. . . . Among the houses he frequented was the Southampton Coffee-House, in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane. This he has immortalised in one of the most amusing of his essays, 'On Coffee-House Politicians.' Here, for several years, he used to hold a sort of evening levee, where, after a certain hour at night, he was always to be found, and always more or less ready to take part in that sort of desultory talk in which he excelled every man I have ever met with. Here, in that little bare and comfortless coffee-room, have I scores of times seen the daylight peep through the crevices of the window-shutters upon 'Table-Talk' that was worthy an intellectual feast of the gods. . . . With regard to his actual method of composition, he never thought for half an hour beforehand as to what he should say on any given subject, or even as to the general manner in which he should treat it. . . . The total want of premeditation with which he could produce, in a singularly short space of time, an essay full of acute or profound thought, copious, with various and novel illustrations, and perfectly original views, couched in terse, polished, vigorous, and epigrammatic language, was quite extraordinary, and is only to be explained by the two facts—first, that he never by choice wrote on any topic or question in which he did not, for some reason or other, feel a deep personal interest ; and secondly, because on all questions on which he did so feel, he had thought, meditated, and pondered, in the silence and solitude of his own heart, for years and years before he ever contemplated doing more than thinking of them."

#### ESTIMATES OF HAZLITT

Before bringing this Memoir to a close, it will be well to place on record a few estimates of Hazlitt's genius, writings, and character

from pens of recognised authority. They will serve as an example of the singular consensus of opinion regarding this remarkable writer among men of high literary reputation as well as of the most diverse intellectual gifts. They are selected from a large array of criticism that would fill a volume, including the names of De Quincey, Jeffrey, Leigh Hunt, John Forster, Albany Fonblanque, Miss Mitford, W. J. Fox, Ebenezer Elliot, Mrs. Jameson, George Gilfillan, Sir A. Alison, and many others. I give only seven, which will represent, as it were, in historical order, the best critical and general estimates of Hazlitt from the time of his death, nearly sixty years ago, down to the present day.

Foremost of all opinions regarding Hazlitt must be placed the beautiful and touching words of his oldest and best-beloved friend, Charles Lamb. They were written on an occasion when he felt bound to defend his friend against some remarks from a hostile quarter. Southey had paid Lamb a compliment at the expense of some of his companions, Hazlitt being included among them. At this time there had been a slight interruption of the friendship between them, arising from a misunderstanding on the part of Hazlitt. This did not matter to Lamb. He loved Hazlitt too well to allow any temporary ill-temper or waywardness on the part of the former to interfere with his affection and esteem for him, and he refused the proffered compliment at such a price. Lamb, with his fine sense of the weakness no less than of the strength of human nature, always made allowance for Hazlitt's errors and inconsistencies, treating them with a wise and just consideration. He always spoke freely of him, behind his back or before his face, but never disparagingly. In canvassing his faults of character, he always bore in mind, and called to mind in others, the rare and admirable qualities by which they were accompanied, and with which they were probably naturally linked. Hazlitt felt this, and it was the secret of his regard for Lamb. As the tribute to Hazlitt referred to was a public one, it at once put an end to the misunderstanding, and no cloud ever afterwards intervened between them. Lamb's words were these, and they will always stand as a noble record of his heart and intellect :—"I stood well with him for fifteen years (the proudest of my life), and have ever spoke my full mind of him to some to whom his panegyric must naturally be least tasteful. I never in thought swerved from him ; I never betrayed him ; I never slackened in my admiration for him ; I was the same to him (neither better nor worse), though he could not see it, as in the days when he thought fit to trust me.

At this instant he may be preparing for me some compliment above my deserts, as he has sprinkled such among his admirable books, for which I rest his debtor ; or, for anything I know or can guess to the contrary, he may be about to read a lecture on my weaknesses. He is welcome to them (as he was to my humble hearth), if they can divert a spleen or ventilate a fit of sullenness. I wish he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does ; but the reconciliation must be effected by himself, and I despair of living to see that day. But, protesting against much that he has written, and some things which he chooses to do ; judging him by his conversations, which I enjoyed so long and relished so deeply, or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes—I should belie my own conscience if I said less than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire ; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such another companion."

Next among these records of opinion regarding Hazlitt I place the following desultory remarks by Bryan Waller Procter, known in literature by the *nom de plume* of Barry Cornwall, and as the father of the poetess, Adelaide Procter. Procter was the intimate and esteemed friend of Hazlitt for sixteen or seventeen years before his death, and the companion of Lamb, Hunt, and other men of letters of the time. These remarks are little more than a rough draft, jotted down between his seventy-fifth and seventy-ninth years—mere memoranda for a more complete portrait which he contemplated. He died at the age of eighty-seven. He was a man of refined literary tastes and culture, and an accomplished writer both in prose and verse. He had a sound judgment and wide sympathies, and was capable of forming a sober and unexaggerated estimate of his contemporaries. Hence the value of his remarks on the subject of this Memoir.

"Justice has never been done, I think, to the great and varied talents of William Hazlitt. The opinion of the dominant party ('public opinion,' as it is called) was directed against him during his life, and that opinion has continued to prevail, amongst the unthinking and easy multitude, ever since. . . . Hazlitt himself had strong passions and a few prejudices ; and his free manifestation of these were adduced as an excuse for the slander and animosity with which he was perpetually assailed. He attacked

others, indeed (a few only), and of these he expressed his dislike in terms sometimes too violent perhaps. . . . Yet, when an opportunity arose to require from him an unbiassed opinion, he was always just. . . . Subject to the faults arising out of this his warm temperament, he possessed qualities worthy of affection and respect. He was a simple, unselfish man, void of all deception and pretence ; and he had a clear, acute intellect, when not traversed by some temporary passion or confused by a strong prejudice. Almost all men come to the consideration of a subject (not mathematical) with some prejudice or predilection. And even a prejudice, as Burke says, has its kernel (which should be preserved) as well as its husk (which should be cast aside). Like many others, he was sometimes swayed by his affections. He loved the first Napoleon beyond the bounds of reason. He loved the worker better than the idler. He hated pretensions supported merely by rank or wealth or repute, or by the clamour of factions. And he felt love and hatred in an intense degree. But he was never dishonest. He never struck down the weak nor trod on the prostrate. He was never treacherous, never tyrannical, never cruel. . . . The history of Hazlitt is like that of some of the scholars of former times, who were always face to face with misfortune. Merit (especially without prudence) is of insufficient strength to oppose injustice, which is always without pity. It seems to be a hopeless task to be always toiling up an ascent, where power and malignity united stand armed at the top. Then at one time he had ill-health, which added its weight to the constant obloquy with which he was assailed. To oppose this were the strength arising from a sense of injustice and the native vigour of his own soul. He had a grand masculine intellect, which conquered details as well as entreties, and rejected nothing which helped the understanding. . . . The decisions of a hostile majority pressed down (as I have said) the reputation of William Hazlitt, and no one has taken the trouble to elevate it to its proper position since. . . . Hazlitt's range of thought was very extensive. He wrote on books and men, on politics and manners. Metaphysics were not too remote from him, nor was the stage too trivial or too near. In his pages you may read of Berkeley and Hume, of Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne. You may recreate yourself with Shakespeare and Milton, with Wordsworth, with Pope, and Lord Byron. He has commented on philosophers and divines, on tragedy and comedy, on poetry and politics, on morals, on manners, on style, on reasoning. . .

Hazlitt's critical style, in all cases where he does not overwhelm it by elaborate eulogy, is strong, picturesque, and expressive. As a piece of eloquent writing, few passages in literature surpass his 'Introduction to the Literature of Elizabeth.' Leigh Hunt said, cleverly, that his 'criticisms on art threw a light on the subject as from a painted window.' . . . No man was competent to write upon Hazlitt who did not know him personally. Some things of which he has been accused were referable merely to temporary humour or irritability, which was not frequent, and which was laid aside in an hour. At other times (by far the greater portion of his life) he was a candid and reasonable man. He felt the injuries and slanders, however, which were spit forth upon him, acutely, and resented them. He was not one of those easy, comfortable, and so-called 'good-natured' men, who are simply inaccessible to strong emotions, and from whom the minor ills of life fall off, without disturbing them, like rain from a pent-house top. . . . His essays are full of thought; full of delicate perceptions. They do not speak of matters which he has merely seen or remembered, but enter into the rights and wrongs of persons; into the meaning and logic of things; into causes and results; into motives and indications of character. He is, in short, not a *raconteur*, but a reasoner. This will be observed in almost all his numerous essays. If he is often ostentatious, that is to say, if he accumulates image upon image, reason upon reason, it is simply that he is more in earnest than other writers."

A few sentences have already been given from Bulwer's "Thoughts on the Genius and Writings of William Hazlitt," contributed to the *Literary Remains*, which appeared six years after his death. The following sentences are taken from the same article:—"He had a keen sense of the Beautiful and the Subtle; and what is more, he was deeply imbued with sympathies for the Humane. He ranks high among the social writers—his intuitive feeling was in favour of the multitude; yet had he nothing of the demagogue in literature; he did not pander to a single vulgar passion. . . . Posterity will do him justice. . . . A complete collection of his works is all the monument he demands. To the next age he will stand amongst the foremost of the *thinkers* of the present; and that late and tardy retribution will assuredly be his, which compensates to others the neglect to which men of genius sometimes (though not so frequently as we believe) are doomed;—that retribution which, long after the envy they provoked is dumb, and the errors they themselves committed

are forgotten—invests with interest everything that is associated with their names ;—making it an honour even to have been their contemporaries.”

Thirty years later the same critic again spoke of Hazlitt in the following terms :—“ Amidst all his intolerant prejudices and his wild extravagance of apparent hate, there are in Hazlitt from time to time—those times not unfrequent—outbursts of sentiment scarcely surpassed among the writers of our century for tender sweetness, rapid perceptions of truth and beauty in regions of criticism then but sparingly cultured—nay, scarcely discovered—and massive fragments of such composition as no hand of ordinary strength could hew out of the unransacked mines of our native language. . . It is not as a guide that Hazlitt can be useful to any man. His merit is that of a companion in districts little trodden—a companion strong and hardy, who keeps our sinews in healthful strain ; rough and irascible ; whose temper will constantly offend us if we do not steadily preserve our own ; but always animated, vivacious, brilliant in his talk ; suggestive of truths even when insisting on paradoxes ; and of whom, when we part company, we retain impressions stamped with the crown-mark of indisputable genius.” (*Quarterly Review*, January 1867, “Charles Lamb and Some of his Companions.”)

“Hazlitt,” says Thackeray (in a review of Horne’s “New Spirit of the Age” in the *Morning Chronicle*, 1845), “was one of the keenest and brightest critics that ever lived. With partialities and prejudices innumerable, he had a wit so keen, a sensibility so exquisite, an appreciation of humour or pathos, or even of the greatest art, so lively, quick, and cultivated, that it was always good to know what were the impressions made by books, or men, or pictures on such a mind ; and that, as there were not probably a dozen men in England with powers so varied, all the rest of the world might be rejoiced to listen to the opinions of this accomplished critic. He was of so different a caste to the people who gave authority in his day—the pompous big-wigs and schoolmen, who never could pardon him his familiarity of manner, so unlike their own—his popular—too popular—habits and sympathies, so much beneath their dignity. . . . In all his modes of life and thought he was so different from the established authorities, with their degrees and white neckcloths, that they hooted the man down with all the power of their lungs, and disdained to hear truth that came from such a rugged philosopher.”

In her “History of England during the Thirty Years’ Peace,”

Harriet Martineau thus writes of Hazlitt :—"In Hazlitt we lost the prince of critics ; and after he was gone, there were many who could never look at a picture, or see a tragedy, or ponder a point of morals, or take a survey of any public character, without a melancholy sense of loss in Hazlitt's absence and silence. There can scarcely be a stronger gratification of the critical faculties than in reading Hazlitt's essays. He was not an amiable and happy, but he was a strong and courageous-minded man. His constitutional irritability was too restless to be soothed by the influences of literature and art, and his friends suffered from his temper almost as much as himself. Yet he was regarded with respect for his ingenuous courage in saying what was true about many important things and persons of his time, of whom it was fitting that the truth should be told. Hazlitt would have passed his life as an artist, but that he could not satisfy his own critical taste, and had no patience with any position but the first in any department in which he worked. The greater part of his life, therefore, was spent in a province of literature in which he was supreme in his own day, if not alone. As an essayist, he had rivals ; as a critical essayist, he had none."

Dr. Richard Garnett, in a carefully written and discriminative article on William Hazlitt in the new edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, thus speaks of this writer : "Hazlitt's criticisms on Shakespeare, the Early Dramatists, the English Poets, Comic Writers, the Novelists and Essayists, are masterpieces of ingenious and felicitous exposition. . . . As an essayist, he is even more effective than as a critic, for his style of composition allows more scope to the striking individuality of his character. Being enabled to select his own subjects, he escapes dependence upon others either for his manner or his illustrations, and presents himself by turns as a metaphysician, a moralist, a humourist, a painter of manners and characteristics, but always, whatever his ostensible theme, deriving the essence of his commentary from his own bosom. This combination of intense subjectivity with strict adherence to his subject is one of Hazlitt's most distinctive and creditable traits. Intellectual truthfulness is a passion with him. He steeps his topic in the hues of his own individuality, but never uses it as a means of self-display. . . . With many serious defects both on the intellectual and the moral side, Hazlitt's character in both had at least the merit of sincerity and consistency. He was a compound of intellect and passion, and the refinement of his critical analysis is associated with vehement eloquence and glowing imagery. He was essentially a critic, a

dissector, and, as Bulwer justly remarks, a much better judge of men of thought than of men of action. But he also possessed many gifts in no way essential to the critical character, and transcending the critic's ordinary sphere. These, while giving him rank as an independent writer, frequently perturbed the natural clearness of his critical judgment, and seduced him into the paradoxes with which his works abound. These paradoxes, however, never spring from affectation; they are in general the sallies of a mind so agile and ardent as to overrun its own goal. His style is perfectly natural, and yet admirably calculated for effect. His diction, always rich and masculine, seems to kindle as he proceeds; and when thoroughly animated by his subject, he advances with a succession of energetic hard-hitting sentences, each carrying his argument a step farther, like a champion dealing out blows as he presses upon the enemy."

The most recent opinion delivered on Hazlitt is from the pen of Mr. George Saintsbury, and it is one with which every discriminating admirer of the essayist will in the main agree. It is characterised by that critical acumen and sound judgment which distinguish most of Mr. Saintsbury's literary estimates. It will be found in *Macmillan's Magazine* for 1887. It is only possible to give some sentences from the paper, which deserves a careful perusal by those who would wish to understand Hazlitt.

"There is indeed no doubt that Hazlitt is one of the most absolutely unequal writers in English, if not in any literature, Wilson being perhaps his only compeer. . . . It could not indeed be otherwise, because the inequality itself is due less to an intellectual than to a moral defect. The clear sunshine of Hazlitt's admirably acute intellect is always there; but it is constantly obscured by driving clouds of furious prejudice. . . . He was, in literature, a great man. I am myself disposed to think that, for all his access of hopelessly uncritical prejudice, he was the greatest critic that England has yet produced; and there are some who think (though I do not agree with them) that he was even greater as a miscellaneous essayist than as a critic. It is certainly upon his essays, critical and other, that his fame must rest. . . . These various drawbacks only set off the merits which almost every lover of literature must perceive in him. In most writers—in all save the very greatest—we look for one or two or for a few special faculties and capacities, and we know perfectly well that other (generally many other) capacities and faculties will not be found in them at all. . . . But in Hazlitt you



may find something of almost everything, except the finer bursts of wit and humour ; to which last, however, he makes a certain side-approach by dint of his appreciation of the irony of nature and fate. Almost every other grace in matter and form that can be found in prose may be found at times in his. . . . Most of the fine writing of these latter days is but as crumpled tarlatan to brocaded satin beside the passage on Coleridge in the *English Poets*, or the description of Winterslow and its neighbourhood in the 'Farewell to Essay-Writing,' or 'On a Landscape of Nicholas Poussin' in the *Table-Talk*. Read these pieces and nothing else, and an excusable impression might be given that the writer was nothing if not florid. But turn over a dozen pages, and the most admirable examples of the grave and chaste manner occur. He is an inveterate quoter, yet few men are more original. No man is his superior in lively, gossipy description, yet he could, within his limits, reason closely and expound admirably. . . . Hazlitt's enthusiastic appreciation of what is good in letters, his combination of gusto with sound theory as to what is excellent in prose and verse, his felicitous method of expression, and the acuteness that kept him from that excessive and paradoxical admiration which both Lamb and Coleridge affected, and which has gained many more pupils than his own moderation, are always present. Nothing better has ever been written than his general view of the subject as an introduction to the Lectures on Elizabethan Literature. Of the famous four treatments of the dramatists of the Restoration—Lamb's, Hazlitt's, Leigh Hunt's, and Macaulay's—his seems to me by far the best. . . . No one has written better on Pope. . . . His chapter on the English novelists (that is to say, those of the last century) is perhaps the best thing ever written on the subject. . . . The 'Character of Cobbett' is the best thing the writer ever did of the kind, and the best thing that has ever been written about Cobbett. . . . 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' is a masterpiece. . . . A hap-hazard catalogue of the titles of essays may not be very succulent. But within moderate space there is really no other means of indicating the author's extraordinary range of subject, and at the same time the pervading excellence of his treatment. . . . In criticism of English literature, he is for the critic a subject never to be wearied of, always to be profited by. His very aberrations are often more instructive than other men's right-goings ; and if he sometimes fails to detect or acknowledge a beauty, he never praises a defect. . . . The fact is that he was a born man of letters, and that he could not help turning everything

he touched into literature. . . . He was not, as it seems to me, quite at home in very short papers—in papers of the length of the average newspaper article. What he could do, as hardly any other man has ever done in England, was a *causerie* of about the same length as Sainte-Beuve's, or a little shorter, less limited in range, but also less artificially proportioned, than the great Frenchman's literary and historical studies, giving scope for considerable digression, but coming to an end before the author was wearied of his subject, or had exhausted the fresh thoughts and the happy borrowings and analogies which he had ready for it. . . . Hazlitt must have been one of the most uncomfortable of all English men of letters, who can be called great, to know as a friend. He is certainly, to those who know him only as readers, one of the most fruitful both in instruction and delight."



# SELECTIONS

FROM THE

## WRITINGS OF WILLIAM HAZLITT.

[*The Eloquence of the British Senate ; or, Select Specimens from the Speeches of the Most Distinguished Parliamentary Speakers, from the beginning of the Reign of Charles the First to the Present Time, with Notes, Biographical, Critical, and Explanatory. In 2 vols., 1807.*]

### THE CHARACTER OF BURKE.

[Originally appeared in *The Eloquence of the British Senate*, reprinted in *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*, 1819, with the following note : "This character was written in a fit of extravagant candour at a time when I thought I could do justice, or more than justice, to an enemy, without betraying a cause." It is included, along with the characters of Fox, Pitt, and Lord Chatham, in one of the volumes of Bell & Sons' edition of Hazlitt's principal works, 1872.]

THERE is no single speech of Mr. Burke which can convey a satisfactory idea of his powers of mind: to do him justice, it would be necessary to quote all his works; the only specimen of Burke is, *all that he wrote*. With respect to most other speakers, a specimen is generally enough, or more than enough. When you are acquainted with their manner, and see what proficiency they have made in the mechanical exercise of their profession, with what facility they can borrow a simile, or round a period, how dexterously they can argue, and object, and rejoin, you are satisfied; there is no other difference in their speeches than what arises from the difference of the subjects. But this was not the case with Burke. He brought his

subjects along with him; he drew his materials from himself. The only limits which circumscribed his variety were the stores of his own mind. His stock of ideas did not consist of a few meagre facts, meagrely stated, of half a dozen commonplaces tortured into a thousand different ways; but his mine of wealth was a profound understanding, inexhaustible as the human heart, and various as the sources of human nature. He therefore enriched every subject to which he applied himself, and new subjects were only the occasions of calling forth fresh powers of mind which had not been before exerted. It would therefore be in vain to look for the proof of his powers in any one of his speeches or writings: they all contain some additional proof of power. In speaking of Burke, then, I shall speak of the whole compass and circuit of his mind—not of that small part or section of him which I have been able to give; to do otherwise would be like the story of the man who put the brick in his pocket, thinking to show it as the model of a house. I have been able to manage pretty well with respect to all my other speakers, and curtailed them down without remorse. It was easy to reduce them within certain limits, to fix their spirit, and condense their variety; by having a certain quantity given, you might infer all the rest; it was only the same thing over again. But who can bind Proteus, or confine the roving flight of genius?

Burke's writings are better than his speeches, and indeed his speeches are writings. But he seemed to feel himself more at ease, to have a fuller possession of his faculties in addressing the public, than in addressing the House of Commons. Burke was *raised* into public life; and he seems to have been prouder of this new dignity than became so great a man. For this reason, most of his speeches have a sort of parliamentary preamble to them: he seems fond of coquetting with the House of Commons, and is perpetually calling the Speaker out to dance a minuet with him before he begins. There is also something like an attempt to stimulate the superficial dulness of his hearers by exciting their surprise, by running into extravagance: and he sometimes demeans himself by condescending to what may be considered as bordering too much upon buffoonery, for the amusement of the company. Those lines of Milton were admirably applied to him by some one—"The elephant to make them sport wreathed his proboscis lithe." The truth is, that he was out of his place in the House of Commons; he was eminently qualified to shine as a man of genius, as the instructor of mankind, as the brightest luminary of his age; but he had nothing in common with that motley crew of knights, citizens, and burghesses. He could not be said to be "native and endued unto that element." He was

above it; and never appeared like himself, but when, forgetful of the idle clamours of party, and of the little views of little men, he applied to his country and the enlightened judgment of mankind.

I am not going to make an idle panegyric on Burke (he has no need of it); but I cannot help looking upon him as the chief boast and ornament of the English House of Commons. What has been said of him is, I think, strictly true, that "he was the most eloquent man of his time: his wisdom was greater than his eloquence." The only public man that in my opinion can be put in any competition with him, is Lord Chatham; and he moved in a sphere so very remote, that it is almost impossible to compare them. But though it would perhaps be difficult to determine which of them excelled most in his particular way, there is nothing in the world more easy than to point out in what their peculiar excellences consisted. They were in every respect the reverse of each other. Chatham's eloquence was popular: his wisdom was altogether plain and practical. Burke's eloquence was that of the poet; of the man of high and unbounded fancy: his wisdom was profound and contemplative. Chatham's eloquence was calculated to make men *act*: Burke's was calculated to make them *think*. Chatham could have roused the fury of a multitude, and wielded their physical energy as he pleased: Burke's eloquence carried conviction into the mind of the retired and lonely student, opened the recesses of the human breast, and lighted up the face of nature around him. Chatham supplied his hearers with motives to immediate action: Burke furnished them with *reasons* for action which might have little effect upon them at the time, but for which they would be the wiser and better all their lives after. In research, in originality, in variety of knowledge, in richness of invention, in depth and comprehension of mind, Burke had as much the advantage of Lord Chatham as he was excelled by him in plain common sense, in strong feeling, in steadiness of purpose, in vehemence, in warmth, in enthusiasm, and energy of mind. Burke was the man of genius, of fine sense, and subtle reasoning; Chatham was a man of clear understanding, of strong sense, and violent passions. Burke's mind was satisfied with speculation: Chatham's was essentially *active*; it could not rest without an object. The power which governed Burke's mind was his Imagination; that which gave its *impetus* to Chatham was Will. The one was almost the creature of pure intellect, the other of physical temperament.

There are two very different ends which a man of genius may propose to himself, either in writing or speaking, and which will accordingly give birth to very different styles. He can have but one of these two objects; either to enrich or strengthen the mind; either to

furnish us with new ideas, to lead the mind into new trains of thought, to which it was before unused, and which it was incapable of striking out for itself; or else to collect and embody what we already knew, to rivet our old impressions more deeply; to make what was before plain still plainer, and to give to that which was familiar all the effect of novelty. In the one case we receive an accession to the stock of our ideas; in the other, an additional degree of life and energy is infused into them: our thoughts continue to flow in the same channels, but their pulse is quickened and invigorated. I do not know how to distinguish these different styles better than by calling them severally the inventive and refined, or the impressive and vigorous styles. It is only the subject-matter of eloquence, however, which is allowed to be remote or obscure. The things themselves may be subtle and recondite, but they must be dragged out of their obscurity and brought struggling to the light; they must be rendered plain and palpable (as far as it is in the wit of man to do so), or they are no longer eloquence. That which by its natural impenetrability, and in spite of every effort, remains dark and difficult, which is impervious to every ray, on which the imagination can shed no lustre, which can be clothed with no beauty, is not a subject for the orator or poet. At the same time it cannot be expected that abstract truths or profound observations should ever be placed in the same strong and dazzling points of view as natural objects and mere matters of fact. It is enough if they receive a reflex and borrowed lustre, like that which cheers the first dawn of morning, where the effect of surprise and novelty gilds every object, and the joy of beholding another world gradually emerging out of the gloom of night, "a new creation rescued from his reign," fills the mind with a sober rapture. Philosophical eloquence is in writing what *chiaro-scuro* is in painting; he would be a fool who should object that the colours in the shaded part of a picture were not so bright as those on the opposite side; the eye of the connoisseur receives an equal delight from both, balancing the want of brilliancy and effect with the greater delicacy of the tints, and difficulty of the execution. In judging of Burke, therefore, we are to consider, first, the style of eloquence which he adopted, and, secondly, the effects which he produced with it. If he did not produce the same effects on vulgar minds as some others have done, it was not for want of power, but from the turn and direction of his mind. It was because his subjects, his ideas, his arguments, were less vulgar. The question is not whether he brought certain truths equally home to us, but how much nearer he brought them than they were before. In my opinion, he united the two extremes of

refinement and strength in a higher degree than any other writer whatever.

The subtlety of his mind was undoubtedly that which rendered Burke a less popular writer and speaker than he otherwise would have been. It weakened the impression of his observations upon others, but I cannot admit that it weakened the observations themselves; that it took anything from their real weight or solidity. Coarse minds think all that is subtle, futile: that because it is not gross and obvious and palpable to the senses, it is therefore light and frivolous, and of no importance in the real affairs of life; thus making their own confined understandings the measure of truth, and supposing that whatever they do not distinctly perceive, is nothing. Seneca, who was not one of the vulgar, also says, that subtle truths are those which have the least substance in them, and consequently approach nearest to nonentity. But for my own part I cannot help thinking that the most important truths must be the most refined and subtle; for that very reason, that they must comprehend a great number of particulars, and instead of referring to any distinct or positive fact, must point out the combined effects of an extensive chain of causes, operating gradually, remotely, and collectively, and therefore imperceptibly. General principles are not the less true or important because from their nature they elude immediate observation; they are like the air, which is not the less necessary because we neither see nor feel it, or like that secret influence which binds the world together, and holds the planets in their orbits. The very same persons who are the most forward to laugh at all systematic reasoning as idle and impertinent, you will the next moment hear exclaiming bitterly against the baleful effects of new-fangled systems of philosophy, or gravely descanting on the immense importance of instilling sound principles of morality into the mind. It would not be a bold conjecture, but an obvious truism, to say, that all the great changes which have been brought about in the mortal world, either for the better or worse, have been introduced, not by the bare statement of facts, which are things already known, and which must always operate nearly in the same manner, but by the development of certain opinions and abstract principles of reasoning on life and manners, on the origin of society and man's nature in general, which being obscure and uncertain, vary from time to time, and produce corresponding changes in the human mind. They are the wholesome dew and rain, or the mildew and pestilence that silently destroy. To this principle of generalisation all wise law-givers, and the systems of philosophers, owe their influence.



It has always been with me a test of the sense and candour of any one belonging to the opposite party, whether he allowed Burke to be a great man. Of all the persons of this description that I have ever known, I never met with above one or two who would make this concession; whether it was that party feelings ran too high to admit of any real candour, or whether it was owing to an essential vulgarity in their habits of thinking, they all seemed to be of opinion that he was a wild enthusiast, or a hollow sophist, who was to be answered by bits of facts, by smart logic, by shrewd questions, and idle songs. They looked upon him as a man of disordered intellects, because he reasoned in a style to which they had not been used, and which confounded their dim perceptions. If you said that though you differed with him in sentiment, yet you thought him an admirable reasoner, and a close observer of human nature, you were answered with a loud laugh, and some hackneyed quotation. "Alas! Leviathan was not so tamed!" They did not know whom they had to contend with. The corner-stone, which the builders rejected, became the head-corner, though to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; for, indeed, I cannot discover that he was much better understood by those of his own party, if we may judge from the little affinity there is between his mode of reasoning and theirs. The simple clue to all his reasonings on politics is, I think, as follows. He did not agree with some writers that that mode of government is necessarily the best which is the cheapest. He saw in the construction of society other principles at work, and other capacities of fulfilling the desires, and perfecting the nature of man, besides those of securing the equal enjoyment of the means of animal life, and doing this at as little expense as possible. He thought that the wants and happiness of men were not to be provided for, as we provide for those of a herd of cattle, merely by attending to their physical necessities. He thought more nobly of his fellows. He knew that man had affections and passions and powers of imagination, as well as hunger and thirst, and the sense of heat and cold. He took his idea of political society from the pattern of private life, wishing, as he himself expresses it, to incorporate the domestic charities with the orders of the state, and to blend them together. He strove to establish an analogy between the compact that binds together the community at large, and that which binds together the several families that compose it. He knew that the rules that form the basis of private morality are not founded in reason, that is, in the abstract properties of those things which are the subjects of them, but in the nature of man, and his capacity of being affected by certain things

from habit, from imagination, and sentiment, as well as from reason.

Thus, the reason why a man ought to be attached to his wife and children is not, surely, that they are better than others (for in this case every one else ought to be of the same opinion), but because he must be chiefly interested in those things which are nearest to him, and with which he is best acquainted, since his understanding cannot reach equally to everything; because he must be most attached to those objects which he has known the longest, and which by their situation have actually affected him the most, not those which in themselves are the most affecting whether they have ever made any impression on him or no; that is, because he is by his nature the creature of habit and feeling, and because it is reasonable that he should act in conformity to his nature. Burke was so far right in saying that it is no objection to an institution that it is founded in *prejudice*, but the contrary, if that prejudice is natural and right; that is, if it arises from those circumstances which are properly subjects of feeling and association, not from any defect or perversion of the understanding in those things which fall strictly under its jurisdiction. On this profound maxim he took his stand. Thus he contended, that the prejudice in favour of nobility was natural and proper, and fit to be encouraged by the positive institutions of society: not on account of the real or personal merit of the individuals, but because such an institution has a tendency to enlarge and raise the mind, to keep alive the memory of past greatness, to connect the different ages of the world together, to carry back the imagination over a long tract of time, and feed it with the contemplation of remote events: because it is natural to think highly of that which inspires us with high thoughts, which has been connected for many generations with splendour, and affluence, and dignity, and power, and privilege. He also conceived, that by transferring the respect from the person to the thing, and thus rendering it steady and permanent, the mind would be habitually formed to sentiments of deference, attachment, and fealty, to whatever else demanded its respect: that it would be led to fix its view on what was elevated and lofty, and be weaned from that low and narrow jealousy which never willingly or heartily admits of any superiority in others, and is glad of every opportunity to bring down all excellence to a level with its own miserable standard. Nobility did not, therefore, exist to the prejudice of the other orders of the state, but by, and for them. The inequality of the different orders of society did not destroy the unity and harmony of the whole. The health and well-being of the moral world was to be promoted

by the same means as the beauty of the natural world; by contrast, by change, by light and shade, by variety of parts, by order and proportion. To think of reducing all mankind to the same insipid level, seemed to him the same absurdity as to destroy the inequalities of surface in a country, for the benefit of agriculture and commerce. In short, he believed that the interests of men in society should be consulted, and their several stations and employments assigned, with a view to their nature, not as physical, but as moral beings, so as to nourish their hopes, to lift their imagination, to enliven their fancy, to rouse their activity, to strengthen their virtue, and to furnish the greatest number of objects of pursuit, and means of enjoyment to beings constituted as man is, consistently with the order and stability of the whole.

The same reasoning might be extended farther. I do not say that his arguments are conclusive; but they are profound and *true*, as far as they go. There may be disadvantages and abuses necessarily interwoven with his scheme, or opposite advantages of infinitely greater value, to be derived from another order of things and state of society. This, however, does not invalidate either the truth or importance of Burke's reasoning; since the advantages he points out as connected with the mixed form of government are really and necessarily inherent in it: since they are compatible, in the same degree, with no other; since the principle itself on which he rests his argument (whatever we may think of the application) is of the utmost weight and moment; and since, on whichever side the truth lies, it is impossible to make a fair decision without having the opposite side of the question clearly and fully stated to us. This Burke has done in a masterly manner. He presents to you one view or face of society. Let him who thinks he can, give the reverse side with equal force, beauty, and clearness. It is said, I know, that truth is *one*; but to this I cannot subscribe, for it appears to me that truth is *many*. There are as many truths as there are things and causes of action and contradictory principles at work in society. In making up the account of good and evil, indeed, the final result must be one way or the other; but the particulars on which that result depends are infinite and various.

It will be seen from what I have said, that I am very far from agreeing with those who think that Burke was a man without understanding, and a merely florid writer. There are two causes which have given rise to this calumny; namely, that narrowness of mind which leads men to suppose that the truth lies entirely on the side of their own opinions, and that whatever does not make

for them is absurd and irrational; secondly, a trick we have of confounding reason with judgment, and supposing that it is merely the province of the understanding to pronounce sentence, and not to give evidence, or argue the case; in short, that it is a passive, not an active faculty. Thus there are persons who never run into any extravagance, because they are so buttressed up with the opinions of others on all sides, that they cannot lean much to one side or the other; they are so little moved with any kind of reasoning, that they remain at an equal distance from every extreme, and are never very far from the truth, because the slowness of their faculties will not suffer them to make much progress in error. These are persons of great judgment. The scales of the mind are pretty sure to remain even, when there is nothing in them. In this sense of the word, Burke must be allowed to have wanted judgment, by all those who think that he was wrong in his conclusions. The accusation of want of judgment, in fact, only means that you yourself are of a different opinion. But if in arriving at one error he discovered a hundred truths, I should consider myself a hundred times more indebted to him than if, stumbling on that which I consider as the right side of the question, he had committed a hundred absurdities in striving to establish his point. I speak of him now merely as an author, or as far as I and other readers are concerned with him; at the same time, I should not differ from any one who may be disposed to contend that the consequences of his writings as instruments of political power have been tremendous, fatal, such as no exertion of wit or knowledge or genius can ever counteract or atone for.

Burke also gave a hold to his antagonists by mixing up sentiment and imagery with his reasoning; so that, being unused to such a sight in the region of politics, they were deceived, and could not discern the fruit from the flowers. Gravity is the cloak of wisdom; and those who have nothing else think it an insult to affect the one without the other, because it destroys the only foundation on which their pretensions are built. The easiest part of reason is dulness; the generality of the world are therefore concerned in discouraging any example of unnecessary brilliancy that might tend to show that the two things do not always go together. Burke in some measure dissolved the spell. It was discovered, that his gold was not the less valuable for being wrought into elegant shapes, and richly embossed with curious figures; that the solidity of a building is not destroyed by adding to it beauty and ornament; and that the strength of a man's understanding is not always to be estimated in exact proportion to his want of imagination. His understand-

ing was not the less real, because it was not the only faculty he possessed. He justified the description of the poet—

“ How charming is divine philosophy !  
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,  
But musical as is Apollo's lute ! ”

Those who object to this union of grace and beauty with reason, are in fact weak-sighted people, who cannot distinguish the noble and majestic form of Truth from that of her sister Folly, if they are dressed both alike ! But there is always a difference even in the adventitious ornaments they wear, which is sufficient to distinguish them.

Burke was so far from being a gaudy or flowery writer, that he was one of the severest writers we have. His words are the most like things ; his style is the most strictly suited to the subject. He unites every extreme and every variety of composition ; the lowest and the meanest words and descriptions with the highest. He exults in the display of power, in showing the extent, the force, and intensity of his ideas ; he is led on by the mere impulse and vehemence of his fancy, not by the affectation of dazzling his readers by gaudy conceits or pompous images. He was completely carried away by his subject. He had no other object but to produce the strongest impression on his reader, by giving the truest, the most characteristic, the fullest, and most forcible description of things, trusting to the power of his own mind to mould them into grace and beauty. He did not produce a splendid effect by setting fire to the light vapours that float in the regions of fancy, as the chemists make fine colours with phosphorus, but by the eagerness of his blows struck fire from the flint, and melted the hardest substances in the furnace of his imagination. The wheels of his imagination did not catch fire from the rottenness of the materials, but from the rapidity of their motion. One would suppose, to hear people talk of Burke, that his style was such as would have suited the *Lady's Magazine* ; soft, smooth, showy, tender, insipid, full of fine words, without any meaning. The essence of the gaudy or glittering style consists in producing a momentary effect by fine words and images brought together, without order or connection. Burke most frequently produced an effect by the remoteness and novelty of his combinations, by the force of contrast, by the striking manner in which the most opposite and unpromising materials were harmoniously blended together ; not by laying his hands on all the fine things he could think of, but by bringing together those things which he knew would blaze out into glorious light by their

collision. The florid style is a mixture of affectation and commonplace. Burke's was an union of untameable vigour and originality.

Burke was not a verbose writer. If he sometimes multiplies words, it is not for want of ideas, but because there are no words that fully express his ideas, and he tries to do it as well as he can by different ones. He had nothing of the *set* or formal style, the measured cadence, and stately phraseology of Johnson, and most of our modern writers. This style, which is what we understand by the *artificial*, is all in one key. It selects a certain set of words to represent all ideas whatever, as the most dignified and elegant, and excludes all others as low and vulgar. The words are not fitted to the things, but the things to the words. Everything is seen through a false medium. It is putting a mask on the face of nature, which may indeed hide some specks and blemishes, but takes away all beauty, delicacy, and variety. It destroys all dignity or elevation, because nothing can be raised where all is on a level, and completely destroys all force, expression, truth, and character, by arbitrarily confounding the differences of things, and reducing everything to the same insipid standard. To suppose that this stiff uniformity can add anything to real grace or dignity, is like supposing that the human body, in order to be perfectly graceful, should never deviate from its upright posture. Another mischief of this method is, that it confounds all ranks in literature. Where there is no room for variety, no discrimination, no nicety to be shown in matching the idea with its proper word, there can be no room for taste or elegance. A man must easily learn the art of writing, when every sentence is to be cast in the same mould: where he is only allowed the use of one word he cannot choose wrong, nor will he be in much danger of making himself ridiculous by affectation or false glitter, when, whatever subject he treats of, he must treat of it in the same way. This indeed is to wear golden chains for the sake of ornament.

Burke was altogether free from the pedantry which I have here endeavoured to expose. His style was as original, as expressive, as rich and varied, as it was possible; his combinations were as exquisite, as playful, as happy, as unexpected, as bold and daring, as his fancy. If anything, he ran into the opposite extreme of too great an inequality, if truth and nature could ever be carried to an extreme.

Those who are best acquainted with the writings and speeches of Burke will not think the praise I have here bestowed on them exaggerated. Some proof will be found of this in the following extracts. But the full proof must be sought in his works at large,

and particularly in the *Thoughts on the Discontents*; in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*; in his *Letter to the Duke of Bedford*; and in the *Regicide Peace*. The two last of these are perhaps the most remarkable of all his writings, from the contrast they afford to each other. The one is the most delightful exhibition of wild and brilliant fancy that is to be found in English prose, but it is too much like a beautiful picture painted upon gauze; it wants something to support it: the other is without ornament, but it has all the solidity, the weight, the gravity of a judicial record. It seems to have been written with a certain constraint upon himself, and to show those who said he could not *reason*, that his arguments might be stripped of their ornaments without losing anything of their force. It is certainly, of all his works, that in which he has shown most power of logical deduction, and the only one in which he has made any important use of facts. In general he certainly paid little attention to them: they were the playthings of his mind. He saw them as he pleased, not as they were; with the eye of the philosopher or the poet, regarding them only in their general principle, or as they might serve to decorate his subject. This is the natural consequence of much imagination: things that are probable are elevated into the rank of realities. To those who can reason on the essences of things, or who can invent according to nature, the experimental proof is of little value. This was the case with Burke. In the present instance, however, he seems to have forced his mind into the service of facts; and he succeeded completely. His comparison between our connection with France or Algiers, and his account of the conduct of the war, are as clear, as convincing, as forcible examples of this kind of reasoning, as are anywhere to be met with. Indeed I do not think there is anything in Fox (whose mind was purely historical) or in Chatham (who attended to feelings more than facts), that will bear a comparison with them.

Burke has been compared to Cicero—I do not know for what reason. Their excellences are as different, and indeed as opposite, as they can well be. Burke had not the polished elegance, the glossy neatness, the artful regularity, the exquisite modulation of Cicero: he had a thousand times more richness and originality of mind, more strength and pomp of diction.

It has been well observed, that the ancients had no word that properly expresses what we mean by the word *genius*. They perhaps had not the thing. Their minds appear to have been too exact, too retentive, too minute and subtle, too sensible to the external differences of things, too passive under their impressions, to admit of those bold and rapid combinations, those lofty flights of fancy, which,

glancing from heaven to earth, unite the most opposite extremes, and draw the happiest illustrations from things the most remote. Their ideas were kept too confined and distinct by the material form or vehicle in which they were conveyed, to unite cordially together, or be melted down in the imagination. Their metaphors are taken from things of the same class, not from things of different classes; the general analogy, not the individual feeling, directs them in their choice. Hence, as Dr. Johnson observed, their similes are either repetitions of the same idea, or so obvious and general as not to lend any additional force to it; as when a huntress is compared to Diana, or a warrior rushing into battle to a lion rushing on his prey. Their *forte* was exquisite art and perfect imitation. Witness their statues and other things of the same kind. But they had not that high and enthusiastic fancy which some of our own writers have shown. For the proof of this, let any one compare Milton and Shakspeare with Homer and Sophocles, or Burke with Cicero.

It may be asked whether Burke was a poet. He was so only in the general vividness of his fancy, and in richness of invention. There may be poetical passages in his works, but I certainly think that his writings in general are quite distinct from poetry; and that for the reason before given, namely, that the subject-matter of them is not poetical. The finest part of them are illustrations or personifications of dry abstract ideas;<sup>1</sup> and the union between the idea and the illustration is not of that perfect and pleasing kind as to constitute poetry, or indeed to be admissible, but for the effect intended to be produced by it; that is, by every means in our power to give animation and attraction to subjects in themselves barren of ornament, but which at the same time are pregnant with the most important consequences, and in which the understanding and the passions are equally interested.

I have heard it remarked by a person, to whose opinion I would sooner submit than to a general council of critics, that the sound of Burke's prose is not musical; that it wants cadence; and that instead of being so lavish of his imagery as is generally supposed, he seemed to him to be rather parsimonious in the use of it, always expanding and making the most of his ideas. This may be true if we compare him with some of our poets, or perhaps with some of our early prose writers, but not if we compare him with any of our political writers or parliamentary speakers. There are some very fine things of Lord Bolingbroke's on the same subjects, but not

<sup>1</sup> As in the comparison of the British Constitution to the "proud keep of Windsor," &c., the most splendid passage in his works.



equal to Burke's. As for Junius, he is at the head of his class: but that class is not the highest. He has been said to have more dignity than Burke. Yes—if the stalk of a giant is less dignified than the strut of a *petit-maitre*. I do not mean to speak disrespectfully of Junius, but grandeur is not the character of his composition; and if it is not to be found in Burke, it is to be found nowhere.

### LATER REMARKS ON BURKE.

[The following, under the heading "Character of Mr. Burke," dated October 5, 1817, appeared in *Political Essays and Sketches of Public Characters*, 1819.]

It is not without reluctance that we speak of the vices and infirmities of such a mind as Burke's: but the poison of high example has by far the widest range of destruction: and, for the sake of public honour and individual integrity, we think it right to say, that however it may be defended upon other grounds, the political career of that eminent individual has no title to the praise of consistency. Mr. Burke, the opponent of the American war, and Mr. Burke, the opponent of the French Revolution, are not the same person, but opposite persons—not opposite persons only, but deadly enemies. In the latter period, he abandoned not only all his practical conclusions, but all the principles on which they were founded. He proscribed all his former sentiments, denounced all his former friends, rejected and reviled all the maxims to which he had formerly appealed as incontestable. In the American war, he constantly spoke of the rights of the people as inherent, and inalienable: after the French Revolution, he began by treating them with the chicanery of a sophist, and ended by raving at them with the fury of a maniac. In the former case, he held out the duty of resistance to oppression, as the palladium and only ultimate resource of natural liberty; in the latter, he scouted, prejudged, vilified and nicknamed, all resistance in the abstract, as a foul and unnatural union of rebellion and sacrilege. In the one case, to answer the purposes of faction, he made it out, that the people are always in the right; in the other, to answer different ends, he made it out that they are always in the wrong—lunatics in the hands of their royal keepers, patients in the sick-wards of an hospital, or felons in the condemned cells of a prison. In the one, he considered that there was a constant tendency on the part of the prerogative to encroach on the rights of the people, which ought always to be the object of the most watchful jealousy, and of resistance, when necessary: in the other, he pretended to

regard it as the sole occupation and ruling passion of those in power, to watch over the liberties and happiness of their subjects. The burthen of all his speeches on the American war, was conciliation, concession, timely reform, as the only practicable or desirable alternative of rebellion: the object of all his writings on the French Revolution was, to deprecate and explode all concession and all reform, as encouraging rebellion, and as an irretrievable step to revolution and anarchy. In the one, he insulted kings personally, as among the lowest and worst of mankind; in the other, he held them up to the imagination of his readers, as sacred abstractions. In the one case, he was a partisan of the people, to court popularity; in the other, to gain the favour of the Court, he became the apologist of all courtly abuses. In the one case, he took part with those who were actually rebels against his Sovereign: in the other, he denounced as rebels and traitors, all those of his own countrymen who did not yield sympathetic allegiance to a foreign Sovereign, whom we had always been in the habit of treating as an arbitrary tyrant.

Nobody will accuse the principles of his present Majesty, or the general measures of his reign, of inconsistency. If they had no other merit, they have, at least, that of having been all along actuated by one uniform and constant spirit: yet Mr. Burke at one time vehemently opposed, and afterwards most intemperately extolled them: and it was for his recanting his opposition, not for his persevering in it, that he received his pension. He does not himself mention his flaming speeches on the American war, as among the public services which had entitled him to this remuneration.

The truth is, that Burke was a man of fine fancy and subtle reflection; but not of sound and practical judgment, nor of high or rigid principles.—As to his understanding, he certainly was not a great philosopher; for his works of mere abstract reasoning are shallow and inefficient:—nor was he a man of sense and business; for, both in counsel and in conduct, he alarmed his friends as much at least as his opponents:—but he was an acute and accomplished man of letters—an ingenious political essayist. He applied the habit of reflection, which he had borrowed from his metaphysical studies, but which was not competent to the discovery of any elementary truth in that department, with great facility and success, to the mixed mass of human affairs. He knew more of the political machine than a recluse philosopher; and he speculated more profoundly on its principles and general results than a mere politician. He saw a number of fine distinctions and changeable aspects of things, the good mixed with the ill, and the ill mixed with the good; and with a sceptical indifference, in which the exercise of his own ingenuity

was obviously the governing principle, suggested various topics to qualify or assist the judgment of others. But for this very reason, he was little calculated to become a leader or a partisan in any important practical measure. For the habit of his mind would lead him to find out a reason for or against anything: and it is not on speculative refinements (which belong to *every* side of a question), but on a just estimate of the aggregate mass and extended combinations of objections and advantages, that we ought to decide or act. Burke had the power of throwing true or false weights into the scales of political casuistry, but not firmness of mind (or, shall we say, honesty enough) to hold the balance. When he took a side, his vanity or his spleen more frequently gave the casting vote than his judgment; and the fieriness of his zeal was in exact proportion to the levity of his understanding, and the want of conscious sincerity.

He was fitted by nature and habit for the studies and labours of the closet; and was generally mischievous when he came out; because the very subtlety of his reasoning, which, left to itself, would have counteracted its own activity, or found its level in the common sense of mankind, became a dangerous engine in the hands of power, which is always eager to make use of the most plausible pretexts to cover the most fatal designs. That which, if applied as a general observation on human affairs, is a valuable truth suggested to the mind, may, when forced into the interested defence of a particular measure or system, become the grossest and basest sophistry. Facts or consequences never stood in the way of this speculative politician. He fitted them to his preconceived theories, instead of conforming his theories to them. They were the playthings of his style, the sport of his fancy. They were the straws of which his imagination made a blaze, and were consumed, like straws, in the blaze they had served to kindle. The fine things he said about Liberty and Humanity, in his speech on the Begum's affairs, told equally well, whether Warren Hastings was a tyrant or not: nor did he care one jot who caused the famine he described, so that he described it in a way that no one else could. On the same principle, he represented the French priests and nobles under the old regime as excellent moral people, very charitable and very religious, in the teeth of notorious facts,—to answer to the handsome things he had to say in favour of priesthood and nobility in general; and, with similar views, he falsifies the records of our English Revolution, and puts an interpretation on the word *abdication*, of which a schoolboy would be ashamed. He constructed his whole theory of government, in short, not on rational, but on picturesque and fanciful principles; as if the king's crown were a painted gewgaw, to be looked at ou

gala-days; titles an empty sound to please the ear; and the whole order of society a theatrical procession. His lamentations over the age of chivalry, and his projected crusade to restore it, are about as wise as if any one, from reading the Beggar's Opera, should take to picking of pockets: or, from admiring the landscapes of Salvator Rosa, should wish to convert the abodes of civilised life into the haunts of wild beasts and banditti. On this principle of false refinement, there is no abuse, nor system of abuses, that does not admit of an easy and triumphant defence; for there is something which a merely speculative inquirer may always find out, good as well as bad, in every possible system, the best or the worst; and if we can once get rid of the restraints of common sense and honesty, we may easily prove, by plausible words, that liberty and slavery, peace and war, plenty and famine, are matters of perfect indifference. This is the school of politics, of which Mr. Burke was at the head; and it is perhaps to his example, in this respect, that we owe the prevailing tone of many of those newspaper paragraphs, which Mr. Coleridge thinks so invaluable an accession to our political philosophy.

Burke's literary talents were, after all, his chief excellence. His style has all the familiarity of conversation, and all the research of the most elaborate composition. He says what he wants to say, by any means, nearer or more remote, within his reach. He makes use of the most common or scientific terms, of the longest or shortest sentences, of the plainest and most downright, or of the most figurative modes of speech. He gives for the most part loose reins to his imagination, and follows it as far as the language will carry him. As long as the one or the other has any resources in store to make the reader feel and see the thing as he has conceived it, in its nicest shades of difference, in its utmost degree of force and splendour, he never disdains, and never fails to employ them. Yet, in the extremes of his mixed style, there is not much affectation, and but little either of pedantry or of coarseness. He everywhere gives the image he wishes to give, in its true and appropriate colouring: and it is the very crowd and variety of these images that have given to his language its peculiar tone of animation, and even of passion. It is his impatience to transfer his conceptions entire, living, in all their rapidity, strength, and glancing variety, to the minds of others, that constantly pushes him to the verge of extravagance, and yet supports him there in dignified security—

“ Never so sure our rapture to create,  
As when he treads the brink of all we hate.”

He is, with the exception of Jeremy Taylor, the most poetical of

our prose writers, and at the same time his prose never degenerates into the mere effeminacy of poetry; for he always aims at overpowering rather than at pleasing; and consequently sacrifices beauty and delicacy to force and vividness. He has invariably a task to perform, a positive purpose to execute, an effect to produce. His only object is therefore to strike hard, and in the right place; if he misses his mark, he repeats his blow; and does not care how ungraceful the action, or how clumsy the instrument, provided it brings down his antagonist.

### THE CHARACTER OF FOX.

[Originally appeared in the *Eloquence of the British Senate*, 2 vols., 1807, reprinted in *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*, 1819, and is included in one of the volumes of Bell & Sons' edition of Hazlitt's principal works 1872.]

I SHALL begin with observing generally, that Mr. Fox excelled all his contemporaries in the extent of his knowledge, in the clearness and distinctness of his views, in quickness of apprehension, in plain practical common sense, in the full, strong, and absolute possession of his subject. A measure was no sooner proposed than he seemed to have an instantaneous and intuitive perception of its various bearings and consequences; of the manner in which it would operate on the different classes of society, on commerce or agriculture, on our domestic or foreign policy; of the difficulties attending its execution; in a word, of all its practical results, and the comparative advantages to be gained either by adopting or rejecting it. He was intimately acquainted with the interests of the different parts of the community, with the minute and complicated details of political economy, with our external relations, with the views, the resources, and the maxims of other states. He was master of all those facts and circumstances which it was necessary to know in order to judge fairly and determine wisely; and he knew them not loosely or lightly, but in number, weight, and measure. He had also stored his memory by reading and general study, and improved his understanding by the lamp of history. He was well acquainted with the opinions and sentiments of the best authors, with the maxims of the most profound politicians, with the causes of the rise and fall of states, with the general passions of men, with the characters of different nations, and the laws and constitution of his own country.

He was a man of large, capacious, powerful, and highly cultivated intellect. No man could know more than he knew; no man's knowledge could be more sound, more plain and useful; no man's knowledge could lie in more connected and tangible masses; no man could be more perfectly master of his ideas, could reason upon them more closely, or decide upon them more impartially. His mind was full, even to overflowing. He was so habitually conversant with the most intricate and comprehensive trains of thought, or such was the natural vigour and exuberance of his mind, that he seemed to recall them without any effort. His ideas quarrelled for utterance. So far from ever being at a loss for them, he was obliged rather to repress and rein them in, lest they should overwhelm and confound, instead of informing the understandings of his hearers.

If to this we add the ardour and natural impetuosity of his mind, his quick sensibility, his eagerness in the defence of truth, and his impatience of everything that looked like trick or artifice or affectation, we shall be able in some measure to account for the character of his eloquence. His thoughts came crowding in too fast for the slow and mechanical process of speech. What he saw in an instant, he could only express imperfectly, word by word, and sentence after sentence. He would, if he could, "have bared his swelling heart," and laid open at once the rich treasures of knowledge with which his bosom was fraught. It is no wonder that this difference between the rapidity of his feelings, and the formal round-about method of communicating them, should produce some disorder in his frame; that the throng of his ideas should try to overleap the narrow boundaries which confined them, and tumultuously break down their prison-doors, instead of waiting to be let out one by one, and following patiently at due intervals and with mock dignity, like poor dependents, in the train of words; that he should express himself in hurried sentences, in involuntary exclamations, by vehement gestures, by sudden starts and bursts of passion. Everything showed the agitation of his mind. His tongue faltered, his voice became almost suffocated, and his face was bathed in tears. He was lost in the magnitude of his subject. He reeled and staggered under the load of feeling which oppressed him. He rolled like the sea beaten by a tempest. Whoever, having the feelings of a man, compared him at these times with his boasted rival—his stiff, straight, upright figure, his gradual contortions, turning round as if moved by a pivot, his solemn pauses, his deep tones, "whose sound reverberated their own hollowness," must have said, This is a man; that is an automaton. If Fox had needed grace, he would have had it; but it was not the character of his mind, nor would it have suited with the style of his

eloquence. It was Pitt's object to smooth over the abruptness and intricacies of his argument by the gracefulness of his manner, and to fix the attention of his hearers on the pomp and sound of his words. Lord Chatham, again, strove to *command* others; he did not try to convince them, but to overpower their understandings by the greater strength and vehemence of his own; to awe them by a sense of personal superiority: and he therefore was obliged to assume a lofty and dignified manner. It was to him they bowed, not to truth; and whatever related to *himself*, must therefore have a tendency to inspire respect and admiration. Indeed, he would never have attempted to gain that ascendant over men's minds that he did, if either his mind or body had been different from what they were; if his temper had not urged him to control and command others, or if his personal advantages had not enabled him to secure that kind of authority which he coveted. But it would have been ridiculous in Fox to have affected either the smooth plausibility, the stately gravity of the one, or the proud domineering, imposing dignity of the other; or even if he could have succeeded, it would only have injured the effect of his speeches. What he had to rely on was the strength, the solidity of his ideas, his complete and thorough knowledge of his subject. It was his business therefore to fix the attention of his hearers, not on himself, but on his subject; to rivet it there, to hurry it on from words to things:—the only circumstance of which they required to be convinced with respect to himself, was the sincerity of his opinions; and this would be best done by the earnestness of his manner, by giving a loose to his feelings, and by showing the most perfect forgetfulness of himself, and of what others thought of him. The moment a man shows you either by affected words or looks or gestures, that he is thinking of himself, and you, that he is trying either to please or terrify you into compliance, there is an end at once to that kind of eloquence which owes its effect to the force of truth, and to your confidence in the sincerity of the speaker. It was, however, to the confidence inspired by the earnestness and simplicity of his manner, that Mr. Fox was indebted for more than half the effect of his speeches. Some others might possess nearly as much information, as exact a knowledge of the situation and interests of the country; but they wanted that zeal, that animation, that enthusiasm, that deep sense of the importance of the subject, which removes all doubt or suspicion from the minds of the hearers, and communicates its own warmth to every breast. We may convince by argument alone; but it is by the interest we discover in the success of our reasonings, that we persuade others to feel and act with us. There are two circumstances which Fox's speeches and Lord

Chatham's had in common: they are alike distinguished by a kind of plain downright common sense, and by the vehemence of their manner. But still there is a great difference between them, in both these respects. Fox in his opinions was governed by facts—Chatham was more influenced by the feelings of others respecting those facts. Fox endeavoured to find out what the consequences of any measure would be; Chatham attended more to what people would think of it. Fox appealed to the practical reason of mankind; Chatham to popular prejudice. The one repelled the encroachments of power by supplying his hearers with arguments against it; the other by rousing their passions and arming their resentment against those who would rob them of their birthright. Their vehemence and impetuosity arose also from very different feelings. In Chatham it was pride, passion, self-will, impatience of control, a determination to have his own way, to carry everything before him; in Fox it was pure, good nature, a sincere love of truth, an ardent attachment to what he conceived to be right; an anxious concern for the welfare and liberties of mankind. Or if we suppose that ambition had taken a strong hold of both their minds, yet their ambition was of a very different kind: in the one it was the love of power, in the other it was the love of fame. Nothing can be more opposite than these two principles, both in their origin and tendency. The one originates in a selfish, haughty, domineering spirit; the other in a social and generous sensibility, desirous of the love and esteem of others, and anxiously bent upon gaining merited applause. The one grasps at immediate power by any means within its reach: the other, if it does not square its actions by the rules of virtue, at least refers them to a standard which comes the nearest to it—the disinterested applause of our country, and the enlightened judgment of posterity. The love of fame is consistent with the steadiest attachment to principle, and indeed strengthens and supports it; whereas the love of power, where this is the ruling passion, requires the sacrifice of principle, at every turn, and is inconsistent even with the shadow of it. I do not mean to say that Fox had no love of power, or Chatham no love of fame (this would be reversing all we know of human nature), but that the one principle predominated in the one, and the other in the other. My reader will do me great injustice if he supposes that in attempting to describe the characters of different speakers by contrasting their general qualities, I mean anything beyond the *more* or *less*: but it is necessary to describe those qualities simply and in the abstract, in order to make the distinction intelligible. Chatham resented any attack made upon the cause of liberty, of which he was the avowed champion, as an indignity offered to



himself. Fox felt it as a stain upon the honour of his country, and as an injury to the rights of his fellow-citizens. The one was swayed by his own passions and purposes, with very little regard to the consequences; the sensibility of the other was roused, and his passions kindled into a generous flame, by a real interest in whatever related to the welfare of mankind, and by an intense and earnest contemplation of the consequences of the measures he opposed. It was this union of the zeal of the patriot with the enlightened knowledge of the statesman, that gave to the eloquence of Fox a more than mortal energy; that warmed, expanded, penetrated every bosom. He relied on the force of truth and nature alone; the refinements of philosophy, the pomp and pageantry of the imagination were forgotten, or seemed light and frivolous; the fate of nations, the welfare of millions, hung suspended as he spoke; a torrent of manly eloquence poured from his heart, bore down everything in its course, and surprised into a momentary sense of human feeling the breathing corpses, the wire-moved puppets, the stuffed figures, the flexible machinery, the "deaf and dumb things" of a court.

I find (I do not know how the reader feels) that it is difficult to write a character of Fox without running into insipidity or extravagance. And the reason of this is, there are no splendid contrasts, no striking irregularities, no curious distinctions to work upon; no "jutting frieze, buttress, nor coigne of 'vantage," for the imagination to take hold of. It was a plain marble slab, inscribed in plain legible characters, without either hieroglyphics or carving. There was the same directness and manly simplicity in everything that he did. The whole of his character may indeed be summed up in two words—strength and simplicity. Fox was in the class of common men, but he was the first in that class. Though it is easy to describe the differences of things, nothing is more difficult than to describe their degrees or quantities. In what I am going to say, I hope I shall not be suspected of a design to underrate his powers of mind, when in fact I am only trying to ascertain their nature and direction. The degree and extent to which he possessed them can only be known by reading, or indeed by having heard his speeches.

His mind, as I have already said, was, I conceive, purely *historical*; and having said this, I have, I believe, said all. But perhaps it will be necessary to explain a little further what I mean. I mean, then, that his memory was in an extraordinary degree tenacious of facts; that they were crowded together in his mind without the least perplexity or confusion; that there was no chain of consequences too vast for his powers of comprehension; that the different parts and ramifications of his subject were never so involved and intricate but

that they were easily disentangled in the clear prism of his understanding. The basis of his wisdom was experience: he not only knew what had happened, but by an exact knowledge of the real state of things, he could always tell what in the common course of events would happen in future. The force of his mind was exerted on facts: as long as he could lean directly upon these, as long as he had the actual objects to refer to, to steady himself by, he could analyse, he could combine, he could compare and reason upon them, with the utmost exactness; but he could not reason *out* of them. He was what is understood by a *matter-of-fact* reasoner. He was better acquainted with the concrete masses of things, their substantial forms and practical connections, than with their abstract nature or general definitions. He was a man of extensive information, of sound knowledge, and clear understanding, rather than the acute observer or profound thinker. He was the man of business, the accomplished statesman, rather than the philosopher. His reasonings were, generally speaking, calculations of certain positive results, which, the *data* being given, must follow as matters of course, rather than unexpected and remote truths drawn from a deep insight into human nature, and the subtle application of general principles to particular cases. They consisted chiefly in the detail and combination of a vast number of items in an account, worked by the known rules of political arithmetic; not in the discovery of bold, comprehensive, and original theorems in the science. They were rather acts of memory, of continued attention, of a power of bringing all his ideas to bear at once upon a single point, than of reason or invention. He was the attentive observer who watches the various effects and successive movements of a machine already constructed, and can tell how to manage it while it goes on as it has always done; but who knows little or nothing of the principles on which it is constructed, nor how to set it right, if it becomes disordered, except by the most common and obvious expedients. Burke was to Fox what the geometrician is to the mechanic. Much has been said of the "prophetic mind" of Mr. Fox. The same epithet has been applied to Mr. Burke, till it has become proverbial. It has, I think, been applied without much reason to either. Fox wanted the scientific part. Burke wanted the practical. Fox had too little imagination, Burke had too much: that is, he was careless of facts, and was led away by his passions to look at one side of a question only. He had not that fine sensibility to outward impressions, that nice *tact* of circumstances, which is necessary to the consummate politician. Indeed, his wisdom was more that of the legislator than of the active statesman. They both tried their

strength in the Ulysses' bow of politicians, the French Revolution: and they were both foiled. Fox indeed foretold the success of the French in combating with foreign powers. But this was no more than what every friend of the liberty of France foresaw or foretold as well as he. All those on the same side of the question were inspired with the same sagacity on the subject. Burke, on the other hand, seems to have been beforehand with the public in foreboding the internal disorders that would attend the Revolution, and its ultimate failure; but then it is at least a question whether he did not make good his own predictions: and certainly he saw into the causes and connection of events much more clearly after they had happened than before. He was, however, undoubtedly a profound commentator on that apocalyptical chapter in the history of human nature, which I do not think Fox was. Whether led to it by the events or not, he saw thoroughly into the principles that operated to produce them; and he pointed them out to others in a manner which could not be mistaken. I can conceive of Burke, as the genius of the storm, perched over Paris, the centre and focus of anarchy (so he would have us believe), hovering "with mighty wings outspread over the abyss, and rendering it pregnant," watching the passions of men gradually unfolding themselves in new situations, penetrating those hidden motives which hurried them from one extreme into another, arranging and analysing the principles that alternately pervaded the vast chaotic mass, and extracting the elements of order and the cement of social life from the decomposition of all society; while Charles Fox in the meantime dogged the heels of the allies (all the while calling out to them to stop) with his sutler's bag, his muster-roll, and army estimates at his back. He said, You have only fifty thousand troops, the enemy have a hundred thousand: this place is dismantled, it can make no resistance: your troops were beaten last year, they must therefore be disheartened this. This is excellent sense and sound reasoning, but I do not see what it has to do with philosophy. But why was it necessary that Fox should be a philosopher? Why, in the first place, Burke was a philosopher, and Fox, to keep up with him, must be so too. In the second place, it was necessary in order that his indiscreet admirers, who have no idea of greatness but as it consists in certain names and pompous titles, might be able to talk big about their patron. It is a bad compliment we pay to our idol when we endeavour to make him out something different from himself; it shows that we are not satisfied with what he is. I have heard it said that he had as much imagination as Burke. To this extravagant assertion I shall make what I conceive to be a very cautious and moderate answer: that Burke was as superior to Fox

in this respect as Fox perhaps was to the first person you would meet in the street. There is, in fact, hardly an instance of imagination to be met with in any of his speeches; what there is, is of the rhetorical kind. I may, however, be wrong. He might excel as much in profound thought, and richness of fancy, as he did in other things; though I cannot perceive it. However, when any one publishes a book called *The Beauties of Fox*, containing the original reflections, brilliant passages, lofty metaphors, &c., to be found in his speeches, without the detail or connection, I shall be very ready to give the point up.

In logic Fox was inferior to Pitt—indeed, in all the formalities of eloquence, in which the latter excelled as much as he was deficient in the soul of substance. When I say that Pitt was superior to Fox in logic, I mean that he excelled him in the formal division of the subject, in always keeping it in view, as far as he chose; in being able to detect any deviation from it in others; in the management of his general topics; in being aware of the mood and figure in which the argument must move, with all its non-essentials, dilemmas, and alternatives; in never committing himself, nor ever suffering his antagonist to occupy an inch of the plainest ground, but under cover of a syllogism. He had more of “the dazzling fence of argument,” as it has been called. He was, in short, better at his weapon. But then, unfortunately, it was only a dagger of lath that the wind could turn aside; whereas Fox wore a good trusty blade, of solid metal, and real execution.

I shall not trouble myself to inquire whether Fox was a man of strict virtue and principle; or in other words, how far he was one of those who screw themselves up to a certain pitch of ideal perfection, who, as it were, set themselves in the stocks of morality, and make mouths at their own situation. He was not one of that tribe, and shall not be tried by their self-denying ordinances. But he was endowed with one of the most excellent natures that ever fell to the lot of any of God's creatures. It has been said, that “an honest man's the noblest work of God.” There is indeed a purity, a rectitude, an integrity of heart, a freedom from every selfish bias and sinister motive, a manly simplicity and noble disinterestedness of feeling, which is in my opinion to be preferred before every other gift of nature or art. There is a greatness of soul that is superior to all the brilliancy of the understanding. This strength of moral character, which is not only a more valuable but a rarer quality than strength of understanding (as we are oftener led astray by the narrowness of our feelings, than want of knowledge), Fox possessed in the highest degree. He was superior to every kind of jealousy,

of suspicion, of malevolence ; to every narrow and sordid motive. He was perfectly above every species of duplicity, of low art and cunning. He judged of everything in the downright sincerity of his nature, without being able to impose upon himself by any hollow disguise, or to lend his support to anything unfair or dishonourable. He had an innate love of truth, of justice, of probity, of whatever was generous or liberal. Neither his education, nor his connections, nor his situation in life, nor the low intrigues and virulence of party, could ever alter the simplicity of his taste, nor the candid openness of his nature. There was an elastic force about his heart, a freshness of social feeling, a warm glowing humanity, which remained unimpaired to the last. He was by nature a gentleman. By this I mean that he felt a certain deference and respect for the person of every man ; he had an unaffected frankness and benignity in his behaviour to others, the utmost liberality in judging of their conduct and motives. A refined humanity constitutes the character of a gentleman. He was the true friend of his country, as far as it is possible for a statesman to be so. But his love of his country did not consist in his hatred of the rest of mankind. I shall conclude this account by repeating what Burke said of him at a time when his testimony was of the most value. "To his great and masterly understanding he joined the utmost possible degree of moderation : he was of the most artless, candid, open, and benevolent disposition ; disinterested in the extreme ; of a temper mild and placable, even to a fault ; and without one drop of gall in his constitution."

## TUCKER'S "LIGHT OF NATURE PURSUED."

[*An abridgement of The Light of Nature Pursued, by Abraham Tucker, Esq., originally published in seven volumes, under the name of Edward Search, Esq., 1807.*]

. . . A GOOD abridgement ought to contain just as much as we should wish to recollect of a book; it should give back (only in a more perfect manner) to a reader well acquainted with the original, "the image of his mind," so that he would miss no favourite passage, none of the prominent parts, or distinguishing features of the work. . . . As to the pains and labour it has cost me, or the time I have devoted to it, I shall say nothing. However, if any one should be scrupulous on that head, I might answer, as Sir Joshua Reynolds is said to have done to some person who cavilled at the price of a picture, and desired to know how long he had been doing it, "All my life."

Of the work itself, I can speak with more confidence. I do not know of any work in the shape of a philosophical treatise that contains so much good sense so agreeably expressed. The character of the work is, in this respect, altogether singular. Amidst all the abstruseness of the most subtle disquisitions, it is as familiar as Montaigne, and as wild and entertaining as John Bunce. To the ingenuity and closeness of the metaphysician, he unites the practical knowledge of the man of the world, and the utmost sprightliness, and even levity of imagination. He is the only philosopher who appears to have had his senses always *about him*, or to have possessed the enviable faculty of attending at the same time to what was passing in his own mind, and what was going on without him. He applied everything to the purposes of philosophy; he could not see anything, the most familiar objects or the commonest events, without connecting them with the illustration of some difficult problem. The tricks of a young kitten, or a little child at play, were sure to suggest to him some useful observation, or nice distinction. To this habit he was, no doubt, indebted for what Paley

justly calls "his unrivalled power of illustration." To be convinced that he possessed this power in the highest degree, it is only necessary to look into almost any page of his writings. . . .

The great merit of our author's writings is undoubtedly that sound, practical, comprehensive good sense, which is to be found in every part of them. What is, I believe, the truest test of fine sense, is that affecting simplicity in his observations, which proceeds from their extreme truth and liveliness. Whatever recalls strongly to our remembrance the common feelings of human nature, and marks distinctly the changes that take place in the human breast, must always be accompanied with some sense of emotion; for our own nature can never be indifferent to us. . . .

Had our author been a vain man, his situation would not have been an enviable one. Even the sternest stoic of us all wishes at least for some person to enter into his views and feelings, and confirm him in the opinion he entertains of himself. But he does not seem to have had his spirits once cheered by the animating cordial of friendly sympathy. Discouraged by his friends, neglected by the public, and ridiculed by the reviewers, he still drew sufficient encouragement from the testimony of his own mind, and the inward consciousness of truth. He still pursued his inquiries with the same calmness and industry, and entered into the little round of his amusements with the same cheerfulness as ever. He rested satisfied with the enjoyment of himself, and of his own faculties; and was not disgusted with his simple employments, because they made no noise in the world. He did not seek for truth as the echo of loud folly; and he did not desist from the exercise of his own reason, because he could make no impression on ignorance and vulgarity. He could contemplate the truth by its own clear light, without the aid of the false lustre and glittering appearance which it assumes in the admiring eyes of the beholders. He sought for his reward, where only the philosopher will find it, in the secret approbation of his own heart, and the clear convictions of an enlightened understanding. The man of deep reflection is not likely to gain much popular applause; and he does not stand in need of it. He has learned to live upon his own stock, and can build his self-esteem on a better foundation than that of vanity. I cannot help mentioning, that though Mr. Tucker was blind when he wrote the last volumes of his work, which he did with a machine contrived by himself, he has not said a word of this circumstance: this would be with me a sufficient trait of his character.

[*The Round Table ; a Collection of Essays on Literature, Men and Manners* 2 vols., 1817. The chief portion of these Essays originally appeared in the *Examiner*, in 1815-1817. Twelve of the fifty-two were by Leigh Hunt. Three editions have been published.]

## THE LOVE OF LIFE.

It is our intention, in the course of these papers, occasionally to expose certain vulgar errors, which have crept into our reasonings on men and manners. Perhaps one of the most interesting of these is that which relates to the source of our general attachment to life. We are not going to enter into the question, whether life is, on the whole, to be regarded as a blessing, though we are by no means inclined to adopt the opinion of that sage who thought "that the best thing that could have happened to a man was never to have been born, and the next best to have died the moment after he came into existence." The common argument, however, which is made use of to prove the value of life, from the strong desire which almost every one feels for its continuance, appears to be altogether inconclusive. The wise and the foolish, the weak and the strong, the lame and the blind, the prisoner and the free, the prosperous and the wretched, the beggar and the king, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, from the little child who tries to leap over his own shadow to the old man who stumbles blindfold on his grave—all feel this desire in common. Our notions with respect to the importance of life, and our attachment to it, depend on a principle which has very little to do with its happiness or its misery.

The love of life is, in general, the effect, not of our enjoyments, but of our passions. We are not attached to it so much for its own sake, or as it is connected with happiness, as because it is necessary to action. Without life there can be no action—no objects of pursuit—no restless desires—no tormenting passions. Hence it is that we fondly cling to it—that we dread its termination as the close, not of enjoyment, but of hope. The proof that our attachment to life is not absolutely owing to the immediate satisfaction we find in it is, that those persons are commonly found most loth to part with it who have the least enjoyment of it. and who have



the greatest difficulties to struggle with, as losing gamesters are the most desperate. And further, there are not many persons who, with all their pretended love of life, would not, if it had been in their power, have melted down the longest life to a few hours. "The schoolboy," says Addison, "counts the time till the return of the holidays; the minor longs to be of age; the lover is impatient till he is married." "Hope and fantastic expectations spend much of our lives; and while with passion we look for a coronation, or the death of an enemy, or a day of joy, passing from fancy to possession without any intermediate notices, we throw away a precious year."—(Jeremy Taylor.) We would willingly, and without remorse, sacrifice not only the present moment, but all the interval (no matter how long) that separates us from any favourite object. We chiefly look upon life, then, as the means to an end. Its common enjoyments and its daily evils are alike disregarded for any idle purpose we have in view. It should seem as if there were a few green sunny spots in the desert of life, to which we are always hastening forward; we eye them wistfully in the distance, and care not what perils or suffering we endure, so that we arrive at them at last. However weary we may be of the same stale round—however sick of the past—however hopeless of the future—the mind still revolts at the thought of death, because the fancied possibility of good, which always remains with life, gathers strength as it is about to be torn from us for ever, and the dulllest scene looks bright compared with the darkness of the grave. Our reluctance to part with existence evidently does not depend on the calm and even current of our lives, but on the force and impulse of the passions. Hence that indifference to death which has been sometimes remarked in people who lead a solitary and peaceful life in remote and barren districts. The pulse of life in them does not beat strong enough to occasion any violent revulsion of the frame when it ceases. He who treads the green mountain turf, or he who sleeps beneath it, enjoys an almost equal quiet. The death of those persons has always been accounted happy who had attained their utmost wishes, who had nothing left to regret or desire. Our repugnance to death increases in proportion to our consciousness of having lived in vain—to the violence of our efforts, and the keenness of our disappointments—and to our earnest desire to find in the future, if possible, a rich amends for the past. We may be said to nurse our existence with the greatest tenderness, according to the pain it has cost us; and feel at every step of our varying progress the truth of that line of the poet—

"An ounce of sweet is worth a pound of sour."

The love of life is in fact the sum of all our passions and of all our enjoyments; but these are by no means the same thing, for the vehemence of our passion is irritated not less by disappointment than by the prospect of success. Nothing seems to be a match for this general tenaciousness of existence, but such an extremity either of bodily or mental suffering as destroys at once the power both of habit and imagination. In short, the question whether life is accompanied with a greater quantity of pleasure or pain, may be fairly set aside as frivolous, and of no practical utility; for our attachment to life depends on our interest in it, and it cannot be denied that we have more interest in this moving busy scene, agitated with a thousand hopes and fears, and checkered with every diversity of joy and sorrow, than in a dreary blank. To be something is better than to be nothing, because we can feel no interest in *nothing*. Passion, imagination, self-will, the sense of power, the very consciousness of our existence, bind us to life, and hold us fast in its chains, as by a magic spell, in spite of every other consideration. Nothing can be more philosophical than the reasoning which Milton puts into the mouth of the fallen angel—

“ And that must end us, that must be our cure—  
To be no more. Sad cure ! For who would lose,  
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,  
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,  
To perish rather, swallow'd up and lost  
In the wide womb of uncreated night,  
Devoid of sense and motion ? ”

Nearly the same account may be given in answer to the question which has been asked, *Why so few tyrants kill themselves?* In the first place, they are never satisfied with the mischief they have done, and cannot quit their hold of power after all sense of pleasure is fled. Besides, they absurdly argue from the means of happiness placed within their reach to the end itself; and, dazzled by the pomp and pageantry of a throne, cannot relinquish the persuasion that they *ought* to be happier than other men. The prejudice of opinion, which attaches us to life, is in them stronger than in others, and incorrigible to experience. The great are life's fools—dupes of the splendid shadows that surround them, and wedded to the very mockeries of opinion.

Whatever is our situation or pursuit in life, the result will be much the same. The strength of the passion seldom corresponds to the pleasure we find in its indulgence. The miser “ robs himself to increase his store; the ambitious man toils up a slippery precipice only

to be tumbled headlong from its height; the lover is infatuated with the charms of his mistress, exactly in proportion to the mortifications he has received from her. Even those who succeed in nothing—who, as it has been emphatically expressed,

“ Are made desperate by too quick a sense  
Of constant infelicity ; cut off  
From peace like exiles, on some barren rock,  
Their life’s sad prison, with no more of ease  
Than sentinels between two armies set ”—

are yet as unwilling as others to give over the unprofitable strife: their harassed feverish existence refuses rest, and frets the languor of exhausted hope into the torture of unavailing regret. The exile, who has been unexpectedly restored to his country and to liberty, often finds his courage fail with the accomplishment of all his wishes, and the struggle of life and hope ceases at the same instant.

We once more repeat, that we do not, in the foregoing remarks, mean to enter into a comparative estimate of the value of human life, but merely to show that the strength of our attachment to it is a very fallacious test of its happiness.

## LOVE OF THE COUNTRY.

[This letter is incorporated in the critical remarks on Thomson and Cowper in *Lectures on the English Poets*, 1818.]

TO THE EDITOR OF “THE ROUND TABLE.”

SIR,—I do not know that any one has ever explained satisfactorily the true source of our attachment to natural objects, or of that soothing emotion which the sight of the country hardly ever fails to infuse into the mind. Some persons have ascribed this feeling to the natural beauty of the objects themselves; others to the freedom from care, the silence and tranquillity, which scenes of retirement afford; others to the healthy and innocent employments of a country life; others to the simplicity of country manners, and others to different causes; but none to the right one. All these causes may, I believe, have a share in producing this feeling; but there is another more general principle, which has been left untouched, and which I

shall here explain, endeavouring to be as little sentimental as the subject will admit.

Rousseau, in his "Confessions"—the most valuable of all his works—relates that, when he took possession of his room at Annecy, at the house of his beloved mistress and friend, he found that he could see "a little spot of green" from his window, which endeared his situation the more to him, because, he says, it was the first time he had had this object constantly before him since he left Boissy, the place where he was at school when a child. Some such feeling as that here described will be found lurking at the bottom of all our attachments of this sort. Were it not for the recollections habitually associated with them, natural objects could not interest the mind in the manner they do. No doubt the sky is beautiful; the clouds sail majestically along its bosom; the sun is cheering; there is something exquisitely graceful in the manner in which a plant or tree puts forth its branches; the motion with which they bend and tremble in the evening breeze is soft and lovely; there is music in the babbling of a brook; the view from the top of a mountain is full of grandeur; nor can we behold the ocean with indifference. Or, as the minstrel sweetly sings--

" Oh, how can'st thou renounce the boundless store  
Of charms which Nature to her vot'ry yields?  
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,  
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;  
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,  
And all that echoes to the song of even;  
All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,  
And all the dread magnificence of heaven—  
Oh, how can'st thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!"

It is not, however, the beautiful and magnificent alone that we admire in Nature; the most insignificant and the rudest objects are often found connected with the strongest emotions; we become attached to the most common and familiar images, as to the face of a friend whom we have long known, and from whom we have received many benefits. It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention; with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends: it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations, in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain—because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings, and a part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.

There is, generally speaking, the same foundation for our love of Nature as for all our habitual attachments, namely, association of ideas. But this is not all. That which distinguishes this attachment from others is the transferable nature of our feelings with respect to physical objects, the associations connected with any one object extending to the whole class. My having been attached to any particular person does not make me feel the same attachment to the next person I may chance to meet; but if I have once associated strong feelings of delight with the objects of natural scenery, the tie becomes indissoluble, and I shall ever after feel the same attachment to other objects of the same sort. I remember, when I was abroad, the trees and grass and wet leaves rustling in the walks of the Tuileries seemed to be as much English, to be as much the same trees and grass that I had always been used to, as the sun shining over my head was the same sun which I saw in England; the faces only were foreign to me. Whence comes this difference? It arises from our always imperceptibly connecting the idea of the individual with man, and only the idea of the class with natural objects. In the one case, the external appearance or physical structure is the least thing to be attended to; in the other, it is everything. The springs that move the human form, and make it friendly or adverse to me, lie hid within it. There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand contradictory and wayward impulses. I can, therefore, make no inference from one individual to another; nor can my habitual sentiments, with respect to any individual, extend beyond himself to others. But it is otherwise with respect to Nature. There is neither hypocrisy, caprice, nor mental reservation in her favours. Our intercourse with her is not liable to accident or change, interruption or disappointment. She smiles on us still the same. Thus, to give an obvious instance, if I have once enjoyed the cool shade of a tree, and been lulled into a deep repose by the sound of a brook running at its feet, I am sure that wherever I can find a tree and a brook I can enjoy the pleasure again. Hence, when I imagine these objects, I can easily form a mystic personification of the friendly power that inhabits them, dryad or naiad, offering its cool fountain or its tempting shade. Hence the origin of the Grecian mythology. All objects of the same kind being the same, not only in their appearance but in their practical uses, we habitually confound them together under the same general idea; and whatever fondness we may have conceived for one is immediately placed to the common account. The most

opposite kinds and remote trains of feeling gradually go to enrich the same sentiment; and in our love of Nature there is all the force of individual attachment combined with the most airy abstraction. It is this circumstance which gives that refinement, expansion, and wild interest to feelings of this sort, when strongly excited, which every one must have experienced who is a true lover of Nature. The sight of the setting sun does not affect me so much from the beauty of the object itself, from the glory kindled through the glowing skies, the rich broken columns of light, or the dying streaks of day, as that it indistinctly recalls to me numberless thoughts and feelings with which, through many a year and season, I have watched his bright descent in the warm summer evenings, or beheld him struggling to cast a "farewell sweet" through the thick clouds of winter. I love to see the trees first covered with leaves in the spring, the primroses peeping out from some sheltered bank, and the innocent lambs running races on the soft green turf; because at that birth-time of Nature I have always felt sweet hopes and happy wishes—which have not been fulfilled! The dry reeds rustling on the side of a stream—the woods swept by the loud blast—the dark massy foliage of autumn—the grey trunks and naked branches of the trees in winter—the sequestered copse and wide-extended heath—the warm sunny showers and December snows—have all charms for me; there is no object, however trifling or rude, that has not, in some mood or other, found the way to my heart; and I might say, in the words of the poet:

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Thus Nature is a kind of universal home, and every object it presents to us an old acquaintance with unaltered looks:

"Nature did ne'er betray  
The heart that lov'd her, but through all the years  
Of this our life, it is her privilege  
To lead from joy to joy."

For there is that consent and mutual harmony among all her works—one undivided spirit pervading them throughout—that, if we have once knit ourselves in hearty fellowship to any of them, they will never afterwards appear as strangers to us, but, whichever way we turn, we shall find a secret power to have gone out before us, moulding them into such shapes as fancy loves, informing them with life and sympathy, bidding them put on their festive looks and gayest attire at our approach, and to pour all their sweets and choicest treasures at our feet. For him, then, who has well

acquainted himself with Nature's works, she wears always one face, and speaks the same well-known language, striking on the heart, amidst unquiet thoughts and the tumult of the world, like the music of one's native tongue heard in some far-off country.

We do not connect the same feelings with the works of Art as with those of Nature, because we refer them to man, and associate with them the separate interests and passions which we know belong to those who are the authors or possessors of them. Nevertheless, there are some such objects, as a cottage or a village church, which excite in us the same sensations as the sight of Nature, and which are, indeed, almost always included in descriptions of natural scenery.

“Or from the mountain's sides  
View wilds and swelling floods,  
And hamlets brown, and dim-discover'd spires,  
And hear their simple bell.”

Which is in part, no doubt, because they are surrounded with natural objects, and, in a populous country, inseparable from them; and also because the human interest they excite relates to manners and feelings which are simple, common, such as all can enter into, and which, therefore, always produce a pleasing effect upon the mind.

## THE TENDENCY OF SECTS.

THERE is a natural tendency in sects to narrow the mind.

The extreme stress laid upon differences of minor importance, to the neglect of more general truths and broader views of things, gives an inverted bias to the understanding; and this bias is continually increased by the eagerness of controversy, and captious hostility to the prevailing system. A party-feeling of this kind once formed will insensibly communicate itself to other topics; and will be too apt to lead its votaries to a contempt for the opinions of others, a jealousy of every difference of sentiment, and a disposition to arrogate all sound principle as well as understanding to themselves and those who think with them. We can readily conceive how such persons, from fixing too high a value on the practical pledge which they have given of the independence and sincerity of their opinions, come at last to entertain a suspicion of every one else as acting under the shackles of prejudice or the mask of hypocrisy. All those who have not given in their unqualified protests

against received doctrines and established authority, are supposed to labour under an acknowledged incapacity to form a rational determination on any subject whatever. Any argument, not having the presumption of singularity in its favour, is immediately set aside as nugatory. There is, however, no prejudice so strong as that which arises from a fancied exemption from all prejudice. For this last implies not only the practical conviction that it is right, but the theoretical assumption that it cannot be wrong. From considering all objections as in this manner "null and void," the mind becomes so thoroughly satisfied with its own conclusions as to render any further examination of them superfluous, and confounds its exclusive pretensions to reason with the absolute possession of it. Those who, from their professing to submit everything to the test of reason, have acquired the name of Rational Dissenters, have their weak sides as well as other people; nor do we know of any class of disputants more disposed to take their opinions for granted than those who call themselves Freethinkers. A long habit of objecting to everything establishes a monopoly in the right of contradiction—a prescriptive title to the privilege of starting doubts and difficulties in the common belief, without being liable to have our own called in question. There cannot be a more infallible way to prove that we must be in the right, than by maintaining roundly that every one else is in the wrong. Not only the opposition of sects to one another, but their unanimity among themselves, strengthens their confidence in their peculiar notions. They feel themselves invulnerable behind the double fence of sympathy with themselves and antipathy to the rest of the world. Backed by the zealous support of their followers, they become equally intolerant with respect to the opinions of others and tenacious of their own. They fortify themselves within the narrow circle of their new-fangled prejudices; the whole exercise of their right of private judgment is after a time reduced to the repetition of a set of watchwords, which have been adopted as the shibboleth of the party; and their extremest points of faith pass as current as the bead-roll and legends of the Catholics, or St. Athanasius' Creed and the Thirty-nine Articles. We certainly are not going to recommend the establishment of articles of faith, or implicit assent to them, as favourable to the progress of philosophy; but neither has the spirit of opposition to them this tendency, as far as relates to its immediate effects, however useful it may be in its remote consequences. The spirit of controversy substitutes the irritation of personal feeling for the independent exertion of the understanding; and when this irritation ceases, the mind flags for want of a sufficient stimulus to urge it on. It dis-



charges all its energy with its spleen. Besides, this perpetual cavilling with the opinions of others, detecting petty flaws in their arguments, calling them to a literal account for their absurdities, and squaring their doctrines by a pragmatical standard of our own, is necessarily adverse to any great enlargement of mind or original freedom of thought.<sup>1</sup> The constant attention bestowed on a few contested points, by at once flattering our pride, our prejudices, and our indolence, supersedes more general inquiries; and the bigoted controversialist, by dint of repeating a certain formula of belief, shall not only convince himself that all those who differ from him are undoubtedly wrong on that point, but that their knowledge on all others must be comparatively slight and superficial. We have known some very worthy and well-informed Biblical critics, who, by virtue of having discovered that one was not three, or that the same body could not be in two places at once, would be disposed to treat the whole Council of Trent, with Father Paul at their head, with very little deference, and to consider Leo X., with all his court, as no better than drivellers. Such persons will hint to you, as an additional proof of his genius, that Milton was a Nonconformist, and will excuse the faults of "*Paradise Lost*," as Dr. Johnson magnified them, because the author was a Republican. By the all-sufficiency of their merits in believing certain truths which have been "*hid from ages*," they are elevated, in their own imagination, to a higher sphere of intellect, and are released from the necessity of pursuing the more ordinary tracks of inquiry. Their faculties are imprisoned in a few favourite dogmas, and they cannot break through the trammels of a sect. Hence we may remark a hardness and setness in the ideas of those who have been brought up in this way, an aversion to those finer and more delicate operations of the intellect, of taste, and genius, which require greater flexibility and variety of thought, and do not afford the same opportunity for dogmatical assertion and controversial cabal. The distaste of the Puritans, Quakers, &c., to pictures, music, poetry, and the fine arts in general, may be traced to this source as much as to their affected disdain of them, as not sufficiently spiritual and remote from the gross impurity of sense.

<sup>1</sup> The Dissenters in this country (if we except the founders of sects, who fall under a class by themselves) have produced only two remarkable men, Priestley and Jonathan Edwards. The work of the latter on the Will is written with as much power of logic, and more in the true spirit of philosophy, than any other metaphysical work in the language. His object throughout is not to perplex the question, but to satisfy his own mind and the reader's. In general, the principle of Dissent arises more from want of sympathy and imagination, than from strength of reason. The spirit of contradiction is not the spirit of philosophy.

We learn from the interest we take in things, and according to the number of things in which we take an interest. Our ignorance of the real value of different objects and pursuits will in general keep pace with our contempt for them. To set out with denying common sense to every one else is not the way to be wise ourselves; nor shall we be likely to learn much if we suppose that no one can teach us anything worth knowing. Again, a contempt for the habits and manners of the world is as prejudicial as a contempt for its opinions. A puritanical abhorrence of everything that does not fall in with our immediate prejudices and customs must effectually cut us off, not only from a knowledge of the world and of human nature, but of good and evil, of vice and virtue—at least, if we can credit the assertion of Plato (which, to some degree, we do), that the knowledge of everything implies the knowledge of its opposite. “There is some soul of goodness in things evil.” A most respectable sect among ourselves (we mean the Quakers) have carried this system of negative qualities nearly to perfection. They labour diligently, and with great success, to exclude all ideas from their minds which they might have in common with others. On the principle that “evil communications corrupt good manners,” they retain a virgin purity of understanding and laudable ignorance of all liberal arts and sciences; they take every precaution, and keep up a perpetual quarantine against the infection of other people’s vices—or virtues; they pass through the world like figures cut out of paste-board or wood, turning neither to the right nor the left; and their minds are no more affected by the example of the follies, the pursuits, the pleasures, or the passions of mankind, than the clothes which they wear. Their ideas want *airing*; they are the worse for not being used; for fear of soiling them they keep them folded up and laid by in a sort of mental clothes-press through the whole of their lives. They take their notions on trust from one generation to another—like the scanty cut of their coats—and are so wrapped up in these traditional maxims, and so pin their faith on them, that one of the most intelligent of this class of people, not long ago, assured us that “war was a thing that was going quite out of fashion.” This abstract sort of existence may have its advantages, but it takes away all the ordinary sources of a moral imagination, as well as strength of intellect. Interest is the only link that connects them with the world. We can understand the high enthusiasm and religious devotion of monks and anchorites, who gave up the world and its pleasures to dedicate themselves to a sublime contemplation of a future state; but the sect of the Quakers, who have transplanted the maxims of the desert into manufacturing towns and populous

cities—who have converted the solitary cells of the religious orders into counting-houses, their beads into ledgers, and keep a regular “debtor and creditor” account between this world and the next—puzzle us mightily. The Dissenter is not vain, but conceited—that is, he makes up by his own good opinion for the want of the cordial admiration of others; but this often stands their self-love in so good stead that they need not envy their dignified opponents who repose on lawn-sleeves and ermine. The unmerited obloquy and dislike to which they are exposed has made them cold and reserved in their intercourse with society. The same cause will account for the dryness and general homeliness of their style. They labour under a sense of the want of public sympathy. They pursue truth, for its own sake, into its private recesses and obscure corners. They have to dig their way along a narrow underground passage. It is not their object to shine; they have none of the usual incentives of vanity—light, airy, and ostentatious. Archbishopal sees and mitres do not glitter in their distant horizon. They are not wafted on the wings of fancy, fanned by the breath of popular applause. The voice of the world, the tide of opinion, is not with them. They do not, therefore, aim at *éclat*—at outward pomp and show. They have a plain ground to work upon, and they do not attempt to embellish it with idle ornaments. It would be in vain to strew the flowers of poetry round the borders of the Unitarian controversy.

There is one quality common to all sectaries, and that is, a principle of strong fidelity. They are the safest partisans and the steadiest friends. Indeed, they are almost the only people who have any idea of an abstract attachment, either to a cause or to individuals, from a sense of duty, independently of prosperous or adverse circumstances, and in spite of opposition.

### ON “JOHN BUNCLE.”

JOHN BUNCLE is the English Rabelais. This is an author with whom, perhaps, many of our readers are not acquainted, and whom we therefore wish to introduce to their notice. As most of our countrymen delight in English generals and in English admirals, in English courtiers and in English kings, so our great delight is in English authors.

The soul of Francis Rabelais passed into John Amory, the author of “The Life and Adventures of John Bunce.” Both were physicians,

and enemies of too much gravity. Their great business was to enjoy life. Rabelais indulges his spirit of sensuality in wine, in dried neats-tongues, in Bologna sausages, in botargos. John Bunclé shows the same symptoms of inordinate satisfaction in tea and bread-and-butter. While Rabelais roared with Friar John and the monks, John Bunclé gossiped with the ladies, and with equal and uncontrolled gaiety. These two authors possessed all the insolence of health, so that their works give a fillip to the constitution; but they carried off the exuberance of their natural spirits in different ways. The title of one of Rabelais' chapters (and the contents answer to the title) is, "How they chirped over their cups." The title of a corresponding chapter in "John Bunclé" would run thus: "The author is invited to spend the evening with the divine Miss Hawkins, and goes accordingly; with the delightful conversation that ensued." Natural philosophers are said to extract sunbeams from ice; our author has performed the same feat upon the cold quaint subtleties of theology. His constitutional alacrity overcomes every obstacle. He converts the thorns and briars of controversial divinity into a bed of roses. He leads the most refined and virtuous of their sex through the mazes of inextricable problems with the air of a man walking a minuet in a drawing-room; mixes up in the most natural and careless manner the academy of compliments with the rudiments of algebra; or passes with rapturous indifference from the First of St. John and a disquisition on the Logos to the no less metaphysical doctrines of the principle of self-preservation or the continuation of the species. "John Bunclé" is certainly one of the most singular productions in the language, and herein lies its peculiarity. It is a Unitarian romance, and one in which the soul and body are equally attended to. The hero is a great philosopher, mathematician, anatomist, chemist, philologist, and divine, with a good appetite, the best spirits, and an amorous constitution, who sets out on a series of strange adventures to propagate his philosophy, his divinity, and his species, and meets with a constant succession of accomplished females, adorned with equal beauty, wit, and virtue, who are always ready to discuss all kinds of theoretical and practical points with him. His angels—and all his women are angels—have all taken their degrees in more than one science: love is natural to them. He is sure to find

"A mistress and a saint in every grove."

Pleasure and business, wisdom and mirth, take their turns with the most agreeable regularity: *A jocus ad seria, in seriis vicissim ad jocos*

*transire*. After a chapter of calculations in fluxions, or on the descent of tongues, the lady and gentleman fall from Platonics to hoydening, in a manner as truly edifying as anything in the scenes of Vanbrugh or Sir George Etherege. No writer ever understood so well the art of relief. The effect is like travelling in Scotland, and coming all of a sudden to a spot of habitable ground. His mode of making love is admirable. He takes it quite easily, and never thinks of a refusal. His success gives him confidence, and his confidence gives him success. For example: in the midst of one of his rambles in the mountains of Cumberland he unexpectedly comes to an elegant country-seat, where, walking on the lawn with a book in her hand, he sees a most enchanting creature, the owner of the mansion. Our hero is on fire, leaps the ha-ha which separates them, presents himself before the lady with an easy but respectful air, begs to know the subject of her meditation; they enter into conversation, mutual explanations take place, a declaration of love is made, and the wedding-day is fixed for the following Tuesday. Our author now leads a life of perfect happiness with his beautiful Miss Noel, in a charming solitude, for a few weeks, till, on his return from one of his rambles in the mountains, he finds her a corpse. He "*sits with his eyes shut for seven days*," absorbed in silent grief; he then bids adieu to melancholy reflections—not being one of that sect of philosophers who think that "man was made to mourn"—takes horse, and sets out for the nearest watering-place. As he alights at the first inn on the road, a lady dressed in a rich green riding-habit steps out of a coach; John Bunicle hands her into the inn, they drink tea together, they converse, they find an exact harmony of sentiment, a declaration of love follows as a matter of course, and that day week they are married. Death, however, contrives to keep up the ball for him: he marries seven wives in succession, and buries them all. In short, John Bunicle's gravity sat upon him with the happiest indifference possible. He danced the Hays with religion and morality with the ease of a man of fashion and of pleasure. He was determined to see fair-play between grace and nature—between his immortal and his mortal part; and, in case of any difficulty, upon the principle of "first come first served," made sure of the present hour. We sometimes suspect him of a little hypocrisy, but upon a closer inspection it appears to be only an affectation of hypocrisy. His fine constitution comes to his relief, and floats him over the shoals and quicksands that lie in his way, "most dolphin-like." You see him, from mere happiness of nature, chuckling with inward satisfaction in the midst of his periodical penances, his grave grimaces, his death's-heads and *memento moris*:

— "And there the antic sits  
Mocking his state, and grinning at his pomp."

As men make use of olives to give a relish to their wine, so John Buncle made use of philosophy to give a relish to life. He stops in a ball-room at Harrogate to moralise on the small number of faces that appeared there out of those he remembered some years before; all were gone whom he saw at a still more distant period; but this casts no damper on his spirits, and he only dances the longer and better for it. He suffers nothing unpleasant to remain long upon his mind. He gives, in one place, a miserable description of two emaciated valetudinarians whom he met at an inn, supping a little mutton-broth with difficulty; but he immediately contrasts himself with them in fine relief. "While I beheld things with astonishment, the servant," he says, "brought in dinner—a pound of rump-steaks and a quart of green peas, two cuts of bread, a tankard of strong beer, and a pint of port wine; *with a fine appetite I soon despatched my mess, and over my wine, to help digestion, began to sing the following lines.*" The astonishment of the two strangers was now as great as his own had been.

We wish to enable our readers to judge for themselves of the style of our whimsical moralist, but are at a loss what to choose—whether his account of his man O'Fin, or of his friend Tom Fleming, or of his being chased over the mountains by robbers, "whisking before them like the wind away," as if it were high sport; or his address to the sun, which is an admirable piece of serious eloquence; or his character of six Irish gentlemen—Mr. Gollogher, Mr. Gallaspy, Mr. Dunkley, Mr. Makins, Mr. Monaghan, and Mr. O'Keefe—the last "descended from the Irish kings, and first-cousin to the great O'Keefe, who was buried not long ago in Westminster Abbey." He professes to give an account of these Irish gentlemen, "for the honour of Ireland, and as they were curiosities of humankind." Curiosities, indeed, but not so great as their historian!—

"Mr. Makins was the only one of the set who was not tall and handsome. He was a very low thin man, not four feet high, and had but one eye, with which he squinted most shockingly. But as he was matchless on the fiddle, sang well, and chatted agreeably, he was a favourite with the ladies. They preferred ugly Makins (as he was called) to many very handsome men. He was a Unitarian.

"Mr. Monaghan was an honest and charming fellow. This gentleman and Mr. Dunkley married ladies they fell in love with at Harrogate Wells; Dunkley had the fair Alcmena, Miss Cox of Northumberland; and Monaghan, Antiope with haughty charms

Miss Pearson of Cumberland. They lived very happy many years, and their children, I hear, are settled in Ireland!"

Gentle reader, here is the character of Mr. Gallaspy:

"Gallaspy was the tallest and strongest man I have ever seen, well-made, and very handsome: had wit and abilities, sang well, and talked with great sweetness and fluency, but was so extremely wicked that it were better for him if he had been a natural fool. By his vast strength and activity, his riches and eloquence, few things could withstand him. He was the most profane swearer I have known; fought everything, whored everything, and drank seven-in-hand—that is, seven glasses so placed between the fingers of his right hand that, in drinking, the liquor fell into the next glasses, and thereby he drank out of the first glass seven glasses at once. This was a common thing, I find from a book in my possession, in the reign of Charles II., in the madness that followed the restoration of that profligate and worthless prince. But this gentleman was the only man I ever saw who could or would attempt to do it; and he made but one gulp of whatever he drank. He did not swallow a fluid like other people, but if it was a quart, poured it in as from pitcher to pitcher. When he smoked tobacco, he always blew two pipes at once, one at each corner of his mouth, and threw the smoke out at both his nostrils. He had killed two men in duels before I left Ireland, and would have been hanged, but that it was his good fortune to be tried before a judge who never let any man suffer for killing another in this manner. (This was the late Sir John St. Leger.) He debauched all the women he could, and many whom he could not corrupt" . . . The rest of this passage would, we fear, be too rich for the "Round Table," as we cannot insert it, in the manner of Mr. Bunce, in a sandwich of theology. Suffice it to say, that the candour is greater than the candour of Voltaire's "Candide," and the modesty equal to Colley Cibber's.

To his friend Mr. Gollogher he consecrates the following irresistible *petit souvenir* :—

"He might, if he had pleased, have married any one of the most illustrious and richest women in the kingdom; but he had an aversion to matrimony, and could not bear the thoughts of a wife. Love and a bottle were his taste. He was, however, the most honourable of men in his amours, and never abandoned any woman in distress, as too many men of fortune do when they have gratified desire. All the distressed were ever sharers in Mr. Gollogher's fine estate, and especially the girls he had taken to his breast. He provided happily for them all, and left nineteen daughters he had

by several women a thousand pounds each. This was acting with a temper worthy of a man; and to the memory of the benevolent Tom Gollogher I devote this memorandum."

Lest our readers should form rather a coarse idea of our author from the foregoing passages, we will conclude with another list of friends in a different style:—

"The Conniving-house (as the gentlemen of Trinity called it in my time, and long after) was a little public-house, kept by Jack Macklean, about a quarter of a mile beyond Ringsend, on the top of the beach, within a few yards of the sea. Here we used to have the finest fish at all times; and, in the season, green peas, and all the most excellent vegetables. The ale here was always extraordinary, and everything the best; which, with its delightful situation, rendered it a delightful place of a summer's evening. Many a delightful evening have I passed in this pretty thatched house with the famous Larry Grogan, who played on the bagpipes extremely well; dear Jack Lattin, matchless on the fiddle, and the most agreeable of companions; that ever-charming young fellow, Jack Wall, the most worthy, the most ingenious, the most engaging of men, the son of Counsellor Maurice Wall; and many other delightful fellows, who went in the days of their youth to the shades of eternity. When I think of them and their evening songs—'*We will go to Johnny Macklean's, to try if his ale be good or no,*' &c.—and that years and infirmities begin to oppress me—what is life?"

We have another English author, very different from the last-mentioned one, but equal in *naïveté*, and in the perfect display of personal character; we mean Izaak Walton, who wrote the "Complete Angler." That well-known work has an extreme simplicity, and an extreme interest, arising out of its very simplicity. In the description of a fishing-tackle you perceive the piety and humanity of the author's mind. This is the best pastoral in the language, not excepting Pope's or Philips's. We doubt whether Sannazarius' "Piscatory Eclogues" are equal to the scenes described by Walton on the banks of the river Lea. He gives the feeling of the open air. We walk with him along the dusty roadside, or repose on the banks of the river under a shady tree, and in watching for the finny prey imbibe what he beautifully calls "the patience and simplicity of poor honest fishermen." We accompany them to their inn at night, and partake of their simple but delicious fare, while Maud, the pretty milkmaid, at her mother's desire, sings the classical ditties of Sir Walter Raleigh. Good cheer is not neglected in this work, any more than in "John Bunclé," or any other history which sets a



proper value on the good things of life. The prints in the "Complete Angler" give an additional reality and interest to the scenes it describes. While Tottenham Cross shall stand, and longer, thy work, amiable and happy old man, shall last!

## THE CHARACTER OF ROUSSEAU.

MADAME DE STAEL, in her "Letters on the Writings and Character of Rousseau," gives it as her opinion "that the imagination was the first faculty of his mind, and that this faculty even absorbed all the others." And she further adds, "Rousseau had great strength of reason on abstract questions, or with respect to objects which have no reality but in the mind." Both these opinions are radically wrong. Neither imagination nor reason can properly be said to have been the original predominant faculty of his mind. The strength both of imagination and reason which he possessed was borrowed from the excess of another faculty; and the weakness and poverty of reason and imagination which are to be found in his works may be traced to the same source—namely, that these faculties in him were artificial, secondary, and dependent, operating by a power not theirs, but lent to them. The only quality which he possessed in an eminent degree, which alone raised him above ordinary men, and which gave to his writings and opinions an influence greater, perhaps, than has been exerted by any individual in modern times, was extreme sensibility, or an acute and even morbid feeling of all that related to his own impressions, to the objects and events of his life. He had the most intense consciousness of his own existence. No object that had once made an impression on him was ever after effaced. Every feeling in his mind became a passion. His craving after excitement was an appetite and a disease. His interest in his own thoughts and feelings was always wound up to the highest pitch, and hence the enthusiasm which he excited in others. He owed the power which he exercised over the opinions of all Europe, by which he created numberless disciples, and overturned established systems, to the tyranny which his feelings in the first instance exercised over himself. The dazzling blaze of his reputation was kindled by the same fire that fed upon his vitals.<sup>1</sup> His ideas differed from those of other men

<sup>1</sup> He did more towards the French Revolution than any other man. Voltaire, by his wit and penetration, had rendered superstition contemptible

only in their force and intensity. His genius was the effect of his temperament. He created nothing, he demonstrated nothing, by a pure effort of the understanding. His fictitious characters are modifications of his own being, reflections and shadows of himself. His speculations are the obvious exaggerations of a mind giving a loose to its habitual impulses, and moulding all nature to its own purposes. Hence his enthusiasm and his eloquence, bearing down all opposition. Hence the warmth and the luxuriance as well as the sameness of his descriptions. Hence the frequent verbosity of his style; for passion lends force and reality to language, and makes words supply the place of imagination. Hence the tenaciousness of his logic, the acuteness of his observations, the refinement and the inconsistency of his reasoning. Hence his keen penetration, and his strange want of comprehension of mind; for the same intense feeling which enabled him to discern the first principles of things, and seize some one view of a subject in all its ramifications, prevented him from admitting the operation of other causes which interfered with his favourite purpose, and involved him in endless wilful contradictions. Hence his excessive egotism, which filled all objects with himself, and would have occupied the universe with his smallest interest. Hence his jealousy and suspicion of others; for no attention, no respect or sympathy, could come up to the extravagant claims of his self-love. Hence his dissatisfaction with himself and with all around him; for nothing could satisfy his ardent longings after good, his restless appetite of being. Hence his feelings, overstrained and exhausted, recoiled upon themselves, and produced his love of silence and repose, his feverish aspirations after the quiet and solitude of nature. Hence in part also his quarrel with the artificial institutions and distinctions of society, which opposed so many barriers to the unrestrained indulgence of his will, and allured his imagination to scenes of pastoral simplicity or of savage life, where the passions were either not excited or left to follow their own impulse—where the petty vexations and irritating disappointments of common life had no place—and where the tormenting pursuits of arts and sciences were lost in pure animal enjoyment or indolent repose. Thus he describes the first savage wandering for ever under the shade of magnificent forests or by the side of mighty rivers, smit with the unquenchable love of nature!

and tyranny odious; but it was Rousseau who brought the feeling of irreconcilable enmity to rank and privileges, *above humanity*, home to the bosom of every man—identified it with all the pride of intellect and with the deepest yearnings of the human heart.

The best of all his works is the "Confessions," though it is that which has been least read, because it contains the fewest set paradoxes or general opinions. It relates entirely to himself; and no one was ever so much at home on this subject as he was. From the strong hold which they had taken of his mind, he makes us enter into his feelings as if they had been our own, and we seem to remember every incident and circumstance of his life as if it had happened to ourselves. We are never tired of this work, for it everywhere presents us with pictures which we can fancy to be counterparts of our own existence. The passages of this sort are innumerable. There is the interesting account of his childhood, the constraints and thoughtless liberty of which are so well described; of his sitting up all night reading romances with his father, till they were forced to desist by hearing the swallows twittering in their nests; his crossing the Alps, described with all the feelings belonging to it—his pleasure in setting out, his satisfaction in coming to his journey's end, the delight of "coming and going he knew not where;" his arriving at Turin; the figure of Madame Basile, drawn with such inimitable precision and elegance; the delightful adventure of the Château de Tounne, where he passed the day with Mademoiselle G \* \* \* \* and Mademoiselle Galley; the story of his Zulietta, the proud, the charming Zulietta, whose last words, "*Va Zanetto, e studia la Matematica*," were never to be forgotten; his sleeping near Lyons in a niche of the wall, after a fine summer's day, with a nightingale perched above his head; his first meeting with Madame Warens, the pomp of sound with which he has celebrated her name, beginning "Louise Eleonore de Warens étoit une demoiselle de la Tour de Pil, noble et ancienne famille de Vevai, ville du pays de Vaud" (sounds which we still tremble to repeat); his description of her person, her angelic smile, her mouth of the size of his own; his walking out one day while the bells were chiming to vespers, and anticipating in a sort of waking dream the life he afterwards led with her, in which months and years, and life itself, passed away in undisturbed felicity; the sudden disappointment of his hopes; his transport thirty years after at seeing the same flower which they had brought home together from one of their rambles near Chambéry; his thoughts in that long interval of time; his suppers with Grimm and Diderot after he came to Paris; the first idea of his prize dissertation on the savage state; his account of writing the "New Eloise," and his attachment to Madame d'Houdetot; his literary projects, his fame, his misfortunes, his unhappy temper; his last solitary retirement in the lake and island of Bienne, with his dog and his boat; his reveries and

delicious musings there—all these crowd into our minds with recollections which we do not choose to express. There are no passages in the “New Eloise” of equal force and beauty with the best descriptions in the “Confessions,” if we except the excursion on the water, Julia’s last letter to St. Preux, and his letter to her, recalling the days of their first loves. We spent two whole years in reading these two works, and (gentle reader, it was when we were young) in shedding tears over them,

‘ As fast as the Arabian trees  
Their medicinal gums.”

They were the happiest years of our life. We may well say of them, sweet is the dew of their memory, and pleasant the balm of their recollection! There are, indeed, impressions which neither time nor circumstances can efface.

Rousseau, in all his writings, never once lost sight of himself. He was the same individual from first to last. The springs that moved his passions never went down, the pulse that agitated his heart never ceased to beat. It was this strong feeling of interest, accumulating in his mind, which overpowers and absorbs the feelings of his readers. He owed all his power to sentiment. The writer who most nearly resembles him in our own times is the author of the “Lyrical Ballads.” We see no other difference between them, than that the one wrote in prose and the other in poetry, and that prose is perhaps better adapted to express those local and personal feelings, which are inveterate habits in the mind, than poetry, which embodies its imaginary creations. We conceive that Rousseau’s exclamation, “*Ah, voilà de la pervenche!*” comes more home to the mind than Mr. Wordsworth’s discovery of the linnet’s nest “with five blue eggs,” or than his address to the cuckoo, beautiful as we think it is; and we will confidently match the citizen of Geneva’s adventures on the Lake of Bienne against the Cumberland poet’s floating dreams on the Lake of Grasmere. Both create an interest out of nothing, or rather out of their own feelings; both weave numberless recollections into one sentiment; both wind their own being round whatever object occurs to them. But Rousseau, as a prose-writer, gives only the habitual and personal impression. Mr. Wordsworth, as a poet, is forced to lend the colours of imagination to impressions which owe all their force to their identity with themselves, and tries to paint what is only to be felt. Rousseau, in a word, interests you in certain objects by interesting you in himself: Mr. Wordsworth would persuade you that the most insignificant objects are interesting in themselves,

because he is interested in them. If he had met with Rousseau's favourite periwinkle, he would have *translated* it into the most beautiful of flowers.

This is not imagination, but want of sense. If his jealousy of the sympathy of others makes him avoid what is beautiful and grand in nature, why does he undertake elaborately to describe other objects? *His* nature is a mere Dulcinea del Toboso, and he would make a Vashti of her. Rubens appears to have been as extravagantly attached to his three wives as Raphael was to his Fornarina; but their faces were not so classical. The three greatest egotists that we know of—that is, the three writers who felt their own being most powerfully and exclusively—are Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Benvenuto Cellini. As Swift somewhere says, we defy the world to furnish out a fourth.

## GOOD-NATURE.

LORD SHAFTESBURY somewhere remarks that a great many people pass for very good-natured persons for no other reason than because they care about nobody but themselves; and consequently, as nothing annoys them but what touches their own interest, they never irritate themselves unnecessarily about what does not concern them, and seem to be made of the very milk of human kindness.

Good-nature—or what is often considered as such—is the most selfish of all the virtues; it is, nine times out of ten, mere indolence of disposition. A good-natured man is, generally speaking, one who does not like to be put out of his way; and, as long as he can help it—that is, till the provocation comes home to himself—he will not. He does not create fictitious uneasiness out of the distresses of others; he does not fret and fume and make himself uncomfortable about things he cannot mend, and that no way concern him even if he could; but then there is no one who is more apt to be disconcerted by what puts him to any personal inconvenience, however trifling; who is more tenacious of his selfish indulgences, however unreasonable; or who resents more violently any interruption of his ease and comforts—the very trouble he is put to in resenting it being felt as an aggravation of the injury. A person of this character feels no emotions of anger or detestation if you tell him of the devastation of a province, or the massacre of the inhabitants of a town or the enslaving of a people; but if his dinner is spoiled by a

lump of soot falling down the chimney he is thrown into the utmost confusion, and can hardly recover a decent command of his temper for the whole day. He thinks nothing can go amiss so long as he is at his ease, though a pain in his little finger makes him so peevish and quarrelsome that nobody can come near him. Knavery and injustice in the abstract are things that by no means ruffle his temper or alter the serenity of his countenance, unless he is to be the sufferer by them; nor is he ever betrayed into a passion in answering a sophism, if he does not think it immediately directed against his own interest.

On the contrary, we sometimes meet with persons who regularly heat themselves in an argument, and get out of humour on every occasion, and make themselves obnoxious to a whole company about nothing. This is not because they are ill-tempered, but because they are in earnest. Good-nature is a hypocrite; it tries to pass off its love of its own ease, and indifference to everything else, for a particular softness and mildness of disposition. All people get in a passion and lose their temper if you offer to strike them or cheat them of their money—that is, if you interfere with that which they are really interested in. Tread on the heel of one of these good-natured persons—who do not care if the whole world is in flames—and see how he will bear it. If the truth were known, the most disagreeable people are the most amiable. They are the only persons who feel an interest in what does not concern them. They have as much regard for others as they have for themselves. They have as many vexations and causes of complaint as there are in the world. They are general righters of wrongs and redressers of grievances. They not only are annoyed by what they can help—by an act of inhumanity done in the next street, or in a neighbouring country by their own countrymen; they not only do not claim any share in the glory, and hate it the more, the more brilliant the success; but a piece of injustice done three thousand years ago touches them to the quick. They have an unfortunate attachment to a set of abstract phrases, such as *liberty, truth, justice, humanity, honour*, which are continually abused by knaves and misunderstood by fools; and they can hardly contain themselves for spleen. They have something to keep them in perpetual hot water. No sooner is one question set at rest than another rises up to perplex them. They wear themselves to the bone in the affairs of other people, to whom they can do no manner of service, to the neglect of their own business and pleasure. They tease themselves to death about the morality of the Turks or the politics of the French. There are certain words that afflict their ears and things that lacerate their souls, and remain

a plague-spot there for ever after. They have a fellow-feeling with all that has been done, said, or thought in the world. They have an interest in all science and in all art. They hate a lie as much as a wrong, for truth is the foundation of all justice. Truth is the first thing in their thoughts, then mankind, then their country, last themselves. They love excellence and bow to fame, which is the shadow of it. Above all, they are anxious to see justice done to the dead, as the best encouragement to the living and the lasting inheritance of future generations. They do not like to see a great principle undermined, or the fall of a great man. They would sooner forgive a blow in the face than a wanton attack on acknowledged reputation. The contempt in which the French hold Shakspeare is a serious evil to them; nor do they think the matter mended when they hear an Englishman, who would be thought a profound one, say that Voltaire was a man without wit. They are vexed to see genius playing at Tom Fool and honesty turned bawd. It gives them a cutting sensation to see a number of things which, as they are unpleasant to see, we shall not here repeat. In short, they have a passion for truth; they feel the same attachment to the idea of what is right that a knave does to his interest, or that a good-natured man does to his ease; and they have as many sources of uneasiness as there are actual or supposed deviations from this standard in the sum of things, or as there is a possibility of folly and mischief in the world.

Principle is a passion for truth—an incorrigible attachment to a general proposition. Good-nature is humanity that costs nothing. No good-natured man was ever a martyr to a cause—in religion or politics. He has no idea of striving against the stream. He may become a good courtier and a loyal subject; and it is hard if he does not, for he has nothing to do in that case but to consult his ease, interest, and outward appearances. The Vicar of Bray was a good-natured man. What a pity he was but a vicar! A good-natured man is utterly unfit for any situation or office in life that requires integrity, fortitude, or generosity—any sacrifice, except of opinion, or any exertion, but to please. A good-natured man will debauch his friend's mistress, if he has an opportunity, and betray his friend sooner than share disgrace or danger with him. He will not forego the smallest gratification to save the whole world. He makes his own convenience the standard of right and wrong. He avoids the feeling of pain in himself, and shuts his eyes to the sufferings of others. He will put a malefactor or an innocent person (no matter which) to the rack, and only laugh at the uncouthness of the gestures, or wonder that he is so unmannerly as

to cry out. There is no villainy to which he will not lend a helping hand with great coolness and cordiality, for he sees only the pleasant and profitable side of things. He will assent to a falsehood with a leer of complacency, and applaud any atrocity that comes recommended in the garb of authority. He will betray his country to please a Minister, and sign the death-warrant of thousands of wretches, rather than forfeit the congenial smile, the well-known squeeze of the hand. The shrieks of death, the torture of mangled limbs, the last groans of despair, are things that shock his smooth humanity too much ever to make an impression on it; his good-nature sympathises only with the smile, the bow, the gracious salutation, the fawning answer: vice loses its sting, and corruption its poison, in the oily gentleness of his disposition. He will not hear of anything wrong in Church or State. He will defend every abuse by which anything is to be got, every dirty job, every act of every Minister. In an extreme case, a very good-natured man indeed may try to hang twelve honest men than himself to rise at the Bar, and forge the seal of the realm to continue his colleagues a week longer in office. He is a slave to the will of others, a coward to their prejudices, a tool of their vices. A good-natured man is no more fit to be trusted in public affairs than a coward or a woman is to lead an army. Spleen is the soul of patriotism and of public good. Lord Castlereagh is a good-natured man, Lord Eldon is a good-natured man, Charles Fox was a good-natured man. The last instance is the most decisive. The definition of a true patriot is a *good hater*.

A king who is a good-natured man is in a fair way of being a great tyrant. A king ought to feel concern for all to whom his power extends; but a good-natured man cares only about himself. If he has a good appetite, eats and sleeps well, nothing in the universe besides can disturb him. The destruction of the lives or liberties of his subjects will not stop him in the least of his caprices, but will concoct well with his bile, and "good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both." He will send out his mandate to kill and destroy with the same indifference or satisfaction that he performs any natural function of his body. The consequences are placed beyond the reach of his imagination, or would not affect him if they were not, for he is a fool and good-natured. A good-natured man hates more than any one else whatever thwarts his will or contradicts his prejudices; and if he has the power to prevent it, depend upon it, he will use it without remorse and without control.

There is a lower species of this character which is what is usually understood by a *well-meaning man*. A well-meaning man is one who



often does a great deal of mischief without any kind of malice. He means no one any harm, if it is not for his interest. He is not a knave, nor perfectly honest. He does not easily resign a good place. Mr. Vansittart is a well-meaning man.

The Irish are a good-natured people; they have many virtues, but their virtues are those of the heart, not of the head. In their passions and affections they are sincere, but they are hypocrites in understanding. If they once begin to calculate the consequences, self-interest prevails. An Irishman who trusts to his principles and a Scotchman who yields to his impulses are equally dangerous. The Irish have wit, genius, eloquence, imagination, affections; but they want coherence of understanding, and consequently have no standard of thought or action. Their strength of mind does not keep pace with the warmth of their feelings or the quickness of their conceptions. Their animal spirits run away with them; their reason is a jade. There is something crude, indigested, rash, and discordant in almost all that they do or say. They have no system, no abstract ideas. They are "everything by starts, and nothing long." They are a wild people. They hate whatever imposes a law on their understandings or a yoke on their wills. To betray the principles they are most bound by their own professions and the expectations of others to maintain, is with them a reclamation of their original rights, and to fly in the face of their benefactors and friends, an assertion of their natural freedom of will. They want consistency and good faith. They unite fierceness with levity. In the midst of their headlong impulses they have an undercurrent of selfishness and cunning, which in the end gets the better of them. Their feelings, when no longer excited by novelty or opposition, grow cold and stagnant. Their blood, if not heated by passion, turns to poison. They have a rancour in their hatred of any object they have abandoned proportioned to the attachment they have professed to it. Their zeal, converted against itself, is furious.

## COUNTRY PEOPLE.

[From the Essay on Wordsworth's "Excursion."]

ALL country people hate each other. They have so little comfort that they envy their neighbours the smallest pleasure or advantage, and nearly grudge themselves the necessaries of life. From not being accustomed to enjoyment, they become hardened and averse

to it—stupid, for want of thought—selfish, for want of society. There is nothing good to be had in the country, or, if there is, they will not let you have it. They had rather injure themselves than oblige any one else. Their common mode of life is a system of wretchedness and self-denial, like what we read of among barbarous tribes. You live out of the world. You cannot get your tea and sugar without sending to the next town for it; you pay double, and have it of the worst quality. The small-beer is sure to be sour—the milk skimmed—the meat bad, or spoiled in the cooking. You cannot do a single thing you like; you cannot walk out, or sit at home, or write or read, or think or look as if you did, without being subject to impertinent curiosity. The apothecary annoys you with his complaisance; the parson with his superciliousness. If you are poor, you are despised; if you are rich, you are feared and hated. If you do any one a favour, the whole neighbourhood is up in arms; the clamour is like that of a rookery; and the person himself, it is ten to one, laughs at you for your pains, and takes the first opportunity of showing you that he labours under no uneasy sense of obligation. There is a perpetual round of mischief-making and backbiting, for want of any better amusement. There are no shops, no taverns, no theatres, no opera, no concerts, no pictures, no public buildings, no crowded streets, no noise of coaches or of courts of law—neither courtiers nor courtesans, no literary parties, no fashionable routs, no society, no books, or knowledge of books. Vanity and luxury are the civilisers of the world and sweeteners of human life. Without objects either of pleasure or action, it grows harsh and crabbed: the mind becomes stagnant, the affections callous, and the eye dull. Man left to himself soon degenerates into a very disagreeable person. Ignorance is always bad enough; but rustic ignorance is intolerable. Aristotle has observed, that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity. If so, a company of tragedians should be established at the public expense in every village or hundred, as a better mode of education than either Bell's or Lancaster's. The benefits of knowledge are never so well understood as from seeing the effects of ignorance, in their naked undisguised state, upon the common country people. Their selfishness and insensibility are perhaps less owing to the hardships and privations, which make them, like people out at sea in a boat, ready to devour one another, than to their having no idea of anything beyond themselves and their immediate sphere of action. They have no knowledge of, and consequently can take no interest in, anything which is not an object of their senses and of their daily pursuits. They hate all strangers, and have generally

a nickname for the inhabitants of the next village. The two young noblemen in "Guzman d'Alfarache," who went to visit their mistresses only a league out of Madrid, were set upon by the peasants, who came round them calling out, "*A wolf!*" Those who have no enlarged or liberal ideas can have no disinterested or generous sentiments. Persons who are in the habit of reading novels and romances are compelled to take a deep interest in, and to have their affections strongly excited by, fictitious characters and imaginary situations; their thoughts and feelings are constantly carried out of themselves, to persons they never saw and things that never existed. History enlarges the mind, by familiarising us with the great vicissitudes of human affairs and the catastrophes of states and kingdoms; the study of morals accustoms us to refer our actions to a general standard of right and wrong; and abstract reasoning, in general, strengthens the love of truth, and produces an inflexibility of principle which cannot stoop to low trick and cunning. Books, in Bacon's phrase, are "a discipline of humanity." Country people have none of these advantages, nor any others to supply the place of them. Having no circulating libraries to exhaust their love of the marvellous, they amuse themselves with fancying the disasters and disgraces of their particular acquaintance. Having no hump-backed Richard to excite their wonder and abhorrence, they make themselves a bugbear of their own out of the first obnoxious person they can lay their hands on. Not having the fictitious distresses and gigantic crimes of poetry to stimulate their imagination and their passions, they vent their whole stock of spleen, malice, and invention on their friends and next-door neighbours. They get up a little pastoral drama at home, with fancied events, but real characters. All their spare time is spent in manufacturing and propagating the lie for the day, which does its office and expires. The next day is spent in the same manner. It is thus that they embellish the simplicity of rural life! The common people in civilised countries are a kind of domesticated savages. They have not the wild imagination, the passions, the fierce energies, or dreadful vicissitudes of the savage tribes, nor have they the leisure, the indolent enjoyments, and romantic superstitions which belonged to the pastoral life in milder climate and more remote periods of society. They are taken out of a state of nature, without being put in possession of the refinements of art. The customs and institutions of society cramp their imaginations without giving them knowledge. If the inhabitants of the mountainous districts described by Mr. Wordsworth are less gross and sensual than others, they are more selfish. Their egotism becomes more concentrated as they are more

insulated, and their purposes more inveterate as they have less competition to struggle with. The weight of matter which surrounds them crushes the finer sympathies. Their minds become hard and cold, like the rocks which they cultivate. The immensity of their mountains makes the human form appear little and insignificant. Men are seen crawling between heaven and earth, like insects to their graves. Nor do they regard one another more than flies on a wall. Their physiognomy expresses the materialism of their character, which has only one principle—rigid self-will. They move on with their eyes and foreheads fixed, looking neither to the right nor to the left, with a heavy slouch in their gait, and seeming as if nothing would divert them from their path. We do not admire this plodding pertinacity, always directed to the main chance. There is nothing which excites so little sympathy in our minds as exclusive selfishness. If our theory is wrong, at least it is taken from pretty close observation, and is, we think, confirmed by Mr. Wordsworth's own account.

## RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY.

RELIGION either makes men wise and virtuous, or it makes them set up false pretences to both. In the latter case, it makes them hypocrites to themselves as well as others. Religion is, in the grosser minds, an enemy to self-knowledge. The consciousness of the presence of an all-powerful Being, who is both the witness and judge of every thought, word, and action, where it does not produce its proper effect, forces the religious man to practise every mode of deceit upon himself with respect to his real character and motives; for it is only by being wilfully blind to his own faults that he can suppose they will escape the eye of Omniscience. Consequently, the whole business of a religious man's life, if it does not conform to the strict line of his duty, may be said to be to gloss over his errors to himself, and to invent a thousand shifts and palliations in order to hoodwink the Almighty. Where he is sensible of his own delinquency, he knows that it cannot escape the penetration of his invisible Judge; and the distant penalty annexed to every offence, though not sufficient to make him desist from the commission of it, will not suffer him to rest easy till he has made some compromise with his own conscience as to his motives for committing it. As far as relates to this world, a cunning knave may take a pride in the imposition he practises upon others; and instead of striving to

conceal his true character from himself, may chuckle with inward satisfaction at the folly of those who are not wise enough to detect it. "But 'tis not so above." This shallow skin-deep hypocrisy will not serve the turn of the religious devotee, who is "compelled to give in evidence, against himself," and who must first become the dupe of his own imposture before he can flatter himself with the hope of concealment, as children hide their eyes with their hands, and fancy that no one can see them. Religious people often pray very heartily for the forgiveness of a "multitude of trespasses and sins," as a mark of humility, but we never knew them admit any one fault in particular, or acknowledge themselves in the wrong in any instance whatever. The natural jealousy of self-love is in them heightened by the fear of damnation, and they plead *Not Guilty* to every charge brought against them with all the conscious terrors of a criminal at the bar. It is for this reason that the greatest hypocrites in the world are religious hypocrites.

This quality, as it has been sometimes found united with the clerical character, is known by the name of "priestcraft." The ministers of religion are perhaps more liable to this vice than any other class of people. They are obliged to assume a greater degree of sanctity, though they have it not, and to screw themselves up to an unnatural pitch of severity and self-denial. They must keep a constant guard over themselves, have an eye always to their own persons, never relax in their gravity, nor give the least scope to their inclinations. A single slip, if discovered, may be fatal to them. Their influence and superiority depend on their pretensions to virtue and piety; and they are tempted to draw liberally on the funds of credulity and ignorance allotted for their convenient support. All this cannot be very friendly to downright simplicity of character. Besides, they are so accustomed to inveigh against the vices of others that they naturally forget that they have any of their own to correct. They see vice as an object always out of themselves, with which they have no other concern than to denounce and stigmatise it. They are only reminded of it *in the third person*. They as naturally associate sin and its consequences with their flocks as a pedagogue associates a false concord and flogging with his scholars. If we may so express it, they serve as conductors to the lightning of Divine indignation, and have only to point the thunders of the law at others. They identify themselves with that perfect system of faith and morals of which they are the professed teachers, and regard any imputation on their conduct as an indirect attack on the function to which they belong, or as compromising the authority under which they act. It is only the head of the

Popish church who assumes the title of "God's Vicegerent upon Earth;" but the feeling is nearly common to all the oracular interpreters of the will of Heaven—from the successor of St. Peter down to the simple unassuming Quaker, who, disclaiming the imposing authority of title and office, yet fancies himself the immediate organ of a preternatural impulse, and affects to speak only as the Spirit moves him.

There is another way in which the formal profession of religion aids hypocrisy: by erecting a secret tribunal, to which those who affect a more than ordinary share of it can (in case of need) appeal from the judgments of men. The religious impostor reduced to his last shift, and having no other way left to avoid the most "open and apparent shame," rejects the fallible decisions of the world, and thanks God that there is one who knows the heart. He is amenable to a higher jurisdiction, and while all is well with Heaven he can pity the errors and smile at the malice of his enemies. Whatever cuts men off from their dependence on common opinion or obvious appearances must open a door to evasion and cunning, by setting up a standard of right and wrong in every one's own breast, of the truth of which nobody can judge but the person himself. There are some fine instances in the old plays and novels (the best commentaries on human nature) of the effect of this principle in giving the last finishing to the character of duplicity. Miss Harris, in Fielding's "*Amelia*," is one of the most striking. Molière's *Tartuffe* is another instance of the facility with which religion may be perverted to the purposes of the most flagrant hypocrisy. It is an impenetrable fastness, to which this worthy person, like so many others, retires without the fear of pursuit. It is an additional disguise, in which he wraps himself up like a cloak. It is a stalking-horse, which is ready on all occasions—an invisible conscience, which goes about with him—his good genius, that becomes surety for him in all difficulties—swears to the purity of his motives—extricates him out of the most desperate circumstances—baffles detection, and furnishes a plea to which there is no answer.

The same sort of reasoning will account for the old remark, that persons who are stigmatised as nonconformists to the established religion, Jews, Presbyterians, &c., are more disposed to this vice than their neighbours. They are inured to the contempt of the world and steeled against its prejudices; and the same indifference which fortifies them against the unjust censures of mankind may be converted, as occasion requires, into a screen for the most pitiful conduct. They have no cordial sympathy with others, and therefore no sincerity in their intercourse with them. It is the necessity

of concealment, in the first instance, that produces, and is in some measure an excuse for, the habit of hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy, as it is connected with cowardice, seems to imply weakness of body or want of spirit. The impudence and insensibility which belong to it ought to suppose robustness of constitution. There is certainly a very successful and formidable class of sturdy, jolly, able-bodied hypocrites, the Friar Johns of the profession. Raphael has represented Elymas the sorcerer with a hard iron visage and large uncouth figure, made up of bones and muscles; as one not troubled with weak nerves or idle scruples—as one who repelled all sympathy with others—who was not to be jostled out of his course by their censures or suspicions, and who could break with ease through the cobweb snares which he had laid for the credulity of others, without being once entangled in his own delusions. His outward form betrays the hard, unimaginative, self-willed understanding of the sorcerer.

## COMMONPLACE CRITICS.

“Nor can I think what thoughts they can conceive.”

WE have already given some account of commonplace people; we shall now attempt to give a description of another class of the community, who may be called (by way of distinction) commonplace critics. The former are a set of people who have no opinions of their own, and do not pretend to have any; the latter are a set of people who have no opinions of their own, but who affect to have one upon every subject you can mention. The former are a very honest, good sort of people, who are contented to pass for what they are; the latter are a very pragmatistical, troublesome sort of people, who would pass for what they are not, and try to put off their commonplace notions in all companies and on all subjects as something of their own. They are of both species, the grave and the gay; and it is hard to say which is the most tiresome.

A commonplace critic has something to say upon every occasion, and he always tells you either what is not true, or what you knew before, or what is not worth knowing. He is a person who thinks by proxy and talks by rote. He differs with you, not because he thinks you are in the wrong, but because he thinks somebody else will think so. Nay, it would be well if he stopped here; but he will

undertake to misrepresent you by anticipation lest others should misunderstand you, and will set you right, not only in opinions which you have, but in those which you may be supposed to have. Thus, if you say that Bottom the weaver is a character that has not had justice done to it, he shakes his head, is afraid you will be thought extravagant, and wonders you should think the "Midsummer Night's Dream" the finest of all Shakspeare's plays. He judges of matters of taste and reasoning, as he does of dress and fashion, by the prevailing tone of good company; and you would as soon persuade him to give up any sentiment that is current there as to wear the hind-part of his coat before. By the best company, of which he is perpetually talking, he means persons who live on their own estates and other people's ideas. By the opinion of the world, to which he pays and expects you to pay, great deference, he means that of a little circle of his own, where he hears and is heard. Again, *good sense* is a phrase constantly in his mouth, by which he does not mean his own sense or that of anybody else, but the opinions of a number of persons who have agreed to take their opinions on trust from others. If any one observes that there is something better than common sense, viz., *uncommon* sense, he thinks this a bad joke. If you object to the opinions of the majority, as often arising from ignorance or prejudice, he appeals from them to the sensible and well-informed; and if you say there may be other persons as sensible and well-informed as himself and his friends, he smiles at your presumption. If you attempt to prove anything to him, it is in vain, for he is not thinking of what you say, but of what will be thought of it. The stronger your reasons the more incorrigible he thinks you; and he looks upon any attempt to expose his gratuitous assumptions as the wandering of a disordered imagination. His notions are, like plastered figures cast in a mould, as brittle as they are hollow; but they will break before you can make them give way. In fact, he is the representative of a large part of the community—the shallow, the vain, and the indolent—of those who have time to talk and are not bound to think; and he considers any deviation from the select forms of commonplace, or the accredited language of conventional impertinence, as compromising the authority under which he acts in his diplomatic capacity. It is wonderful how this class of people agree with one another; how they herd together in all their opinions; what a tact they have for folly; what an instinct for absurdity; what a sympathy in sentiment; how they find one another out by infallible signs, like Freemasons! The secret of this unanimity and strict accord is, that not any one of them ever admits any opinion that can cost the least



effort of mind in arriving at, or of courage in declaring it. Folly is as consistent with itself as wisdom; there is a certain level of thought and sentiment which the weakest minds, as well as the strongest, find out as best adapted to them; and you as regularly come to the same conclusions by looking no farther than the surface, as if you dug to the centre of the earth! You know beforehand what a critic of this class will say on almost every subject the first time he sees you, the next time, the time after that, and so on to the end of the chapter. The following list of his opinions may be relied on:—It is pretty certain that before you have been in the room with him ten minutes he will give you to understand that Shakspeare was a great but irregular genius. Again, he thinks it a question whether any one of his plays, if brought out now for the first time, would succeed. He thinks that “Macbeth” would be the most likely, from the music which has been since introduced into it. He has some doubts as to the superiority of the French school over us in tragedy, and observes that Hume and Adam Smith were both of that opinion. He thinks Milton’s pedantry a great blemish in his writings, and that “Paradise Lost” has many prosaic passages in it. He conceives that genius does not always imply taste, and that wit and judgment are very different faculties. He considers Dr. Johnson as a great critic and moralist, and that his Dictionary was a work of prodigious erudition and vast industry, but that some of the anecdotes of him in “Boswell” are trifling. He conceives that Mr. Locke was a very original and profound thinker. He thinks Gibbon’s style vigorous but florid. He wonders that the author of “Junius” was never found out. He thinks Pope’s translation of the “Iliad” an improvement on the simplicity of the original, which was necessary to fit it to the taste of modern readers. He thinks there is a great deal of grossness in the old comedies; and that there has been a great improvement in the morals of the higher classes since the reign of Charles II. He thinks the reign of Queen Anne the golden period of our literature, but that, upon the whole, we have no English writer equal to Voltaire. He speaks of Boccaccio as a very licentious writer, and thinks the wit in Rabelais quite extravagant, though he never read either of them. He cannot get through Spenser’s “Fairy Queen,” and pronounces all allegorical poetry tedious. He prefers Smollett to Fielding, and discovers more knowledge of the world in “Gil Blas” than in “Don Quixote.” Richardson he thinks very minute and tedious. He thinks the French Revolution has done a great deal of harm to the cause of liberty; and blames Buonaparte for being so ambitious. He reads the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, and thinks as they do. He is

shy of having an opinion on a new actor or a new singer, for the public do not always agree with the newspapers. He thinks that the moderns have great advantages over the ancients in many respects. He thinks Jeremy Bentham a greater man than Aristotle. He can see no reason why artists of the present day should not paint as well as Raphael or Titian. For instance, he thinks there is something very elegant and classical in Mr. Westall's drawings. He has no doubt that Sir Joshua Reynolds' Lectures were written by Burke. He considers Horne Tooke's account of the conjunction *That* very ingenious, and holds that no writer can be called elegant who uses the present for the subjunctive mood, who says *If it is* for *If it be*. He thinks Hogarth a great master of low comic humour, and Cobbett a coarse, vulgar writer. He often talks of men of liberal education, and men without education, as if that made much difference. He judges of people by their pretensions; and pays attention to their opinions according to their dress and rank in life. If he meets with a fool, he does not find him out; and if he meets with any one wiser than himself, he does not know what to make of him. He thinks that manners are of great consequence to the common intercourse of life. He thinks it difficult to prove the existence of any such thing as original genius, or to fix a general standard of taste. He does not think it possible to define what wit is. In religion his opinions are liberal. He considers all enthusiasm as a degree of madness particularly to be guarded against by young minds; and believes that truth lies in the middle, between the extremes of right and wrong. He thinks that the object of poetry is to please; and that astronomy is a very pleasing and useful study. He thinks all this and a great deal more, that amounts to nothing. We wonder we have remembered one-half of it—

“For true no-meaning puzzles more than wit”

Though he has an aversion to all new ideas, he likes all new plans and matters of fact: the new Schools for All, the Penitentiary, the new Bedlam, the new steamboats, the gaslights, the new patent blacking—everything of that sort but the Bible Society. The Society for the Suppression of Vice he thinks a great nuisance, as every honest man must.

In a word, a commonplace critic is the pedant of polite conversation. He refers to the opinion of Lord M. or Lady G. with the same air of significance that the learned pedant does to the authority of Cicero or Virgil; retails the wisdom of the day, as the anecdote-monger does the wit; and carries about with him the sentiments of people of a certain respectability in life, as the dancing-master does their air or their valets their clothes.

## ACTORS AND ACTING.

PLAYERS are "the abstracts and brief chronicles of the times," the motley representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Their life is a voluntary dream, a studied madness. The height of their ambition is to be *beside themselves*. To-day kings, to-morrow beggars, it is only when they are themselves that they are nothing. Made up of mimic laughter and tears, passing from the extremes of joy or woe at the prompter's call, they wear the livery of other men's fortunes; their very thoughts are not their own. They are, as it were, train-bearers in the pageant of life, and hold a glass up to humanity, frailer than itself. We see ourselves at second-hand in them; they show us all that we are, all that we wish to be, and all that we dread to be. The stage is an epitome, a bettered likeness, of the world, with the dull part left out; and indeed, with this omission, it is nearly big enough to hold all the rest. What brings the resemblance nearer is, that, as *they* imitate us, we, in our turn, imitate them. How many fine gentlemen do we owe to the stage! How many romantic lovers are mere Romeos in masquerade! How many soft bosoms have heaved with Juliet's sighs! They teach us when to laugh and when to weep, when to love and when to hate, upon principle and with a good grace. Wherever there is a playhouse the world will go on not amiss. The stage not only refines the manners, but it is the best teacher of morals, for it is the truest and most intelligible picture of life. It stamps the image of virtue on the mind by first softening the rude materials of which it is composed by a sense of pleasure. It regulates the passions by giving a loose to the imagination. It points out the selfish and depraved to our detestation, the amiable and generous to our admiration; and if it clothes the more seductive vices with the borrowed graces of wit and fancy, even those graces operate as a diversion to the coarser poison of experience and bad example, and often prevent or carry off the infection by inoculating the mind with a certain taste and elegance. . . .

If the stage is useful as a school of instruction, it is no less so as a source of amusement. It is the source of the greatest enjoyment at the time, and a never-failing fund of agreeable reflection afterwards. The merits of a new play or of a new actor are always among the first topics of polite conversation. One way in which public exhibitions contribute to refine and humanise mankind is by supplying them with ideas and subjects of conversation and interest in common. The progress of civilisation is in proportion to the

number of commonplaces current in society. For instance, if we meet with a stranger at an inn or in a stage-coach, who knows nothing but his own affairs, his shop, his customers, his farm, his pigs, his poultry, we can carry on no conversation with him on these local and personal matters, the only way is to let him have all the talk to himself. But if he has fortunately ever seen Mr. Liston act, this is an immediate topic of mutual conversation, and we agree together the rest of the evening in discussing the merits of that inimitable actor, with the same satisfaction as in talking over the affairs of the most intimate friend.

If the stage thus introduces us familiarly to our contemporaries, it also brings us acquainted with former times. It is an interesting revival of past ages, manners, opinions, dresses, persons, and actions—whether it carries us back to the wars of York and Lancaster, or half-way back to the heroic times of Greece and Rome, in some translation from the French, or quite back to the age of Charles II. in the scenes of Congreve and of Etherege (the gay Sir George!)—happy age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no further than the choice of a sword-knot or the adjustment of a side-curl; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing eloquence of dress; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies in giddy mazes through the walks of St. James's Park!

A good company of comedians, a theatre-royal judiciously managed, is your true Heralds' College—the only Antiquarian Society that is worth a rush. It is for this reason that there is such an air of romance about players, and that it is pleasanter to see them, even in their own persons, than any of the three learned professions. We feel more respect for John Kemble in a plain coat than for the Lord Chancellor on the woolsack. He is surrounded, to our eyes, with a greater number of improving recollections; he is a more reverend piece of formality—a more complicated tissue of costume. We do not know whether to look upon this accomplished actor as Pierre, or King John, or Coriolanus, or Cato, or Leontes, or the Stranger. But we see in him a stately hieroglyphic of humanity, a living monument of departed greatness, a sombre comment on the rise and fall of kings. We look after him till he is out of sight as we listen to a story of one of Ossian's heroes, to "a tale of other times!" . . .

The most pleasant feature in the profession of a player, and which indeed is peculiar to it, is, that we not only admire the talents of those who adorn it, but we contract a personal intimacy with them.

There is no class of society whom so many persons regard with affection as actors. We greet them on the stage; we like to meet them in the streets; they almost always recall to us pleasant associations; and we feel our gratitude excited without the uneasiness of a sense of obligation. The very gaiety and popularity, however, which surround the life of a favourite performer make the retiring from it a very serious business. It glances a mortifying reflection on the shortness of human life and the vanity of human pleasures. Something reminds us that "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

[*Characters of Shakspeare's Plays*, 1817. *Five Editions of this work have appeared in England, and more than one in the United States.*]

### MACBETH.

"The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name."

[*Midsummer Night's Dream*, v. i.]

"MACBETH" and "Lear," "Othello" and "Hamlet," are usually reckoned Shakspeare's four principal tragedies. "Lear" stands first for the profound intensity of the passion; "Macbeth" for the wildness of the imagination and the rapidity of the action; "Othello" for the progressive interest and powerful alternations of feeling; "Hamlet" for the refined development of thought and sentiment. If the force of genius shown in each of these works is astonishing, their variety is not less so. They are like different creations of the same mind, not one of which has the slightest reference to the rest. This distinctness and originality is indeed the necessary consequence of truth and nature. Shakspeare's genius alone appeared to possess the resources of nature. He is "your only *tragedy-maker*." His plays have the force of things upon the mind. What he represents is brought home to the bosom as a part of our experience, implanted in the memory as if we had known the places, persons, and things of which he treats. "Macbeth" is like a record of a preternatural and tragical event. It has the rugged severity of an old chronicle with all that the imagination of the poet can engraft upon traditional belief. The castle of Macbeth, round which "the air smells wooingly," and where "the temple-haunting martlet builds," has a real subsistence in the mind; the Weird Sisters meet us in person on "the blasted heath;" the "air-drawn dagger" moves slowly before our

eyes; the "gracious Duncan," the "blood-boltered Banquo," stand before us: all that passed through the mind of Macbeth passes without the loss of a tittle, through ours. All that could actually take place, and all that is only possible to be conceived, what was said and what was done, the workings of passion, the spells of magic, are brought before us with the same absolute truth and vividness. Shakspeare excelled in the openings of his plays: that of "Macbeth" is the most striking of any. The wildness of the scenery, the sudden shifting of the situations and characters, the bustle, the expectations excited, are equally extraordinary. From the first entrance of the Witches and the description of them when they meet Macbeth,

' What are these  
So wither'd, and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth  
And yet are on't ? "

the mind is prepared for all that follows.

This tragedy is alike distinguished for the lofty imagination it displays, and for the tumultuous vehemence of the action; and the one is made the moving principle of the other. The overwhelming pressure of preternatural agency urges on the tide of human passion with redoubled force. Macbeth himself appears driven along by the violence of his fate like a vessel drifting before a storm: he reels to and fro like a drunken man; he staggers under the weight of his own purposes and the suggestions of others; he stands at bay with his situation; and from the superstitious awe and breathless suspense into which the communications of the Weird Sisters throw him, is hurried on with daring impatience to verify their predictions, and with impious and bloody hand to tear aside the veil which hides the uncertainty of the future. He is not equal to the struggle with fate and conscience. He now "bends up each corporal agent to this terrible feat;" at other times his heart misgives him, and he is cowed and abashed by his success. "The attempt, and not the deed, confounds us." His mind is assailed by the stings of remorse, and full of "preternatural solicitings." His speeches and soliloquies are dark riddles on human life, baffling solution, and entangling him in their labyrinths. In thought he is absent and perplexed, sudden and desperate in act, from a distrust of his own resolution. His energy springs from the anxiety and agitation of his mind. His blindly rushing forward on the objects of his ambition and revenge, or his recoiling from them, equally betrays the harassed state of his feelings. This part of his character is admirably set off by being brought in connection with that of Lady Macbeth, whose obdurate

strength of will and masculine firmness give her the ascendancy over her husband's faltering virtue. She at once seizes on the opportunity that offers for the accomplishment of all their wished-for greatness, and never flinches from her object till all is over. The magnitude of her resolution almost covers the magnitude of her guilt. She is a great bad woman, whom we hate, but whom we fear more than we hate. She does not excite our loathing and abhorrence like Regan and Goneril. She is only wicked to gain a great end, and is perhaps more distinguished by her commanding presence of mind and inexorable self-will, which do not suffer her to be diverted from a bad purpose, when once formed, by weak and womanly regrets, than by the hardness of her heart or want of natural affections. The impression which her lofty determination of character makes on the mind of Macbeth is well described where he exclaims,

-“Bring forth men-children only ;  
For thy undaunted mettle should compose  
Nothing but males !”

Nor do the pains she is at to “screw his courage to the sticking-place,” the reproach to him, not to be “lost so poorly in himself,” the assurance that “a little water clears them of this deed,” show anything but her greater consistency in depravity. Her strong-nerved ambition furnishes ribs of steel to the “sides of his intent ;” and she is herself wound up to the execution of her baneful project with the same unshrinking fortitude in crime, that in other circumstances she would probably have shown patience in suffering. The deliberate sacrifice of all other considerations to the gaining “for their future days and nights sole sovereign sway and masterdom,” by the murder of Duncan, is gorgeously expressed in her invocation on hearing of “his fatal entrance under her battlements :”—

-“Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here :  
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty ! make thick my blood,  
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief ! Come, thick night !  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,

That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
 Nor heav'n peep through the blanket of the dark,  
 To cry, Hold, hold !—"

When she first hears that "the king [Duncan] comes here to-night," she is so overcome by the news, which is beyond her utmost expectations, that she answers the messenger, "Thou'rt mad to say it:" and on receiving her husband's account of the predictions of the Witches, conscious of his instability of purpose, and that her presence is necessary to goad him on to the consummation of his promised greatness, she exclaims—

—————"Hie thee hither,  
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,  
 And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
 All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
 Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
 To have thee crown'd withal."

This swelling exultation and keen spirit of triumph, this uncontrollable eagerness of anticipation, which seems to dilate her form and take possession of all her faculties, this solid, substantial flesh-and-blood display of passion, exhibit a striking contrast to the cold, abstracted, gratuitous, servile malignity of the Witches, who are equally instrumental in urging Macbeth to his fate for the mere love of mischief, and from a disinterested delight in deformity and cruelty. They are hags of mischief, obscene panders to iniquity, malicious from their impotence of enjoyment, enamoured of destruction, because they are themselves unreal, abortive, half-existences: who become sublime from their exemption from all human sympathies and contempt for all human affairs, as Lady Macbeth does by the force of passion! Her fault seems to have been an excess of that strong principle of self-interest and family aggrandisement, not amenable to the common feelings of compassion and justice, which is so marked a feature in barbarous nations and times. A passing reflection of this kind, on the resemblance of the sleeping king to her father, alone prevents her from slaying Duncan with her own hand.

In speaking of the character of Lady Macbeth, we ought not to pass over Mrs. Siddons's manner of acting that part. We can conceive of nothing grander. It was something above nature. It seemed almost as if a being of a superior order had dropped from a higher sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine; she was tragedy personified. In coming on in the sleeping-scene, her eyes were open, but their sense was shut. She



was like a person bewildered and unconscious of what she did. Her lips moved involuntarily: all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. She glided on and off the stage like an apparition. To have seen her in that character was an event in every one's life, not to be forgotten.

### OTHELLO.

It has been said that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity. That is, it substitutes imaginary sympathy for mere selfishness. It gives us a high and permanent interest, beyond ourselves, in humanity as such. It raises the great, the remote, and the possible to an equality with the real, the little, and the near. It makes man a partaker with his kind. It subdues and softens the stubbornness of his will. It teaches him that there are and have been others like himself, by showing him as in a glass what they have felt, thought, and done. It opens the chambers of the human heart. It leaves nothing indifferent to us that can affect our common nature. It excites our sensibility by exhibiting the passions wound up to the utmost pitch by the power of imagination or the temptation of circumstances; and corrects their fatal excesses in ourselves by pointing to the greater extent of sufferings and of crimes to which they have led others. Tragedy creates a balance of the affections. It makes us thoughtful spectators in the lists of life. It is the refiner of the species; a discipline of humanity. The habitual study of poetry and works of imagination is one chief part of a well-grounded education. A taste for liberal art is necessary to complete the character of a gentleman. Science alone is hard and mechanical. It exercises the understanding upon things out of ourselves, while it leaves the affections unemployed, or engrossed with our own immediate, narrow interests.—“*Othello*” furnishes an illustration of these remarks. It excites our sympathy in an extraordinary degree. The moral it conveys has a closer application to the concerns of human life than that of almost any other of Shakspeare's plays. “It comes directly home to the bosoms and business of men.” The pathos in “*Lear*” is indeed more dreadful and overpowering; but it is less natural, and less of every day's occurrence. We have not the same degree of sympathy with the passions described in “*Macbeth*.” The interest in “*Hamlet*” is more remote and reflex. That of “*Othello*” is at once equally profound and affecting.

The picturesque contrasts of character in this play are almost as remarkable as the depth of the passion. The Moor *Othello*, the gentle *Desdemona*, the villain *Iago*, the good-natured *Cassio*, the

fool Roderigo, present a range and variety of character as striking and palatable as that produced by the opposition of costume in a picture. Their distinguishing qualities stand out to the mind's eye, so that even when we are not thinking of their actions or sentiments, the idea of their persons is still as present to us as ever. These characters and the images they stamp upon the mind are the farthest asunder possible, the distance between them is immense; yet the compass of knowledge and invention which the poet has shown in embodying these extreme creations of his genius is only greater than the truth and felicity with which he has identified each character with itself, or blended their different qualities together in the same story. What a contrast the character of Othello forms to that of Iago! At the same time, the force of conception with which these two figures are opposed to each other is rendered still more intense by the complete consistency with which the traits of each character are brought out in a state of the highest finishing. The making one black and the other white, the one unprincipled, the other unfortunate in the extreme, would have answered the common purposes of effect, and satisfied the ambition of an ordinary painter of character. Shakspeare has laboured the finer shades of difference in both with as much care and skill as if he had had to depend on the execution alone for the success of his design. On the other hand, Desdemona and Emilia are not meant to be opposed with anything like strong contrast to each other. Both are, to outward appearance, characters of common life, not more distinguished than women usually are, by difference of rank and situation. The difference of their thoughts and sentiments is, however, laid open, their minds are separated from each other by signs as plain and as little to be mistaken as the complexions of their husbands.

The movement of the passion in Othello is exceedingly different from that of Macbeth. In Macbeth there is a violent struggle between opposite feelings, between ambition and the stings of conscience, almost from first to last: in Othello, the doubtful conflict between contrary passions, though dreadful, continues only for a short time, and the chief interest is excited by the alternate ascendancy of different passions, by the entire and unforeseen change from the fondest love and most unbounded confidence to the tortures of jealousy and the madness of hatred. The revenge of Othello, after it has once taken thorough possession of his mind, never quits it, but grows stronger and stronger at every moment of its delay. The nature of the Moor is noble, confiding, tender, and generous; but his blood is of the most inflammable kind; and being once roused by a sense of his wrongs,

he is stopped by no considerations of remorse or pity till he has given a loose to all the dictates of his rage and his despair. It is in working his noble nature up to this extremity through rapid but gradual transitions, in raising passion to its height from the smallest beginnings and in spite of all obstacles, in painting the expiring conflict between love and hatred, tenderness and resentment, jealousy and remorse, in unfolding the strength and the weakness of our nature, in uniting sublimity of thought with the anguish of the keenest woe, in putting in motion the various impulses that agitate this our mortal being, and at last blending them in that noble tide of deep and sustained passion, impetuous but majestic, that "flows on to the Propontic, and knows no ebb," that Shakspeare has shown the mastery of his genius and of his power over the human heart. The third act of "Othello" is his finest display, not of knowledge or passion separately, but of the two combined, of the knowledge of character with the expression of passion, of consummate art in the keeping up of appearances with the profound workings of nature, and the convulsive movements of uncontrollable agony, of the power of inflicting torture and of suffering it. Not only is the tumult of passion in Othello's mind heaved up from the very bottom of the soul, but every the slightest undulation of feeling is seen on the surface, as it arises from the impulses of imagination or the malicious suggestions of Iago. The progressive preparation for the catastrophe is wonderfully managed from the Moor's first gallant recital of the story of his love, of "the spells and witchcraft he had used," from his unlooked-for and romantic success, the fond satisfaction with which he dotes on his own happiness, the unreserved tenderness of Desdemona and her innocent importunities in favour of Cassio, irritating the suspicions instilled into her husband's mind by the perfidy of Iago, and rankling there to poison, till he loses all command of himself, and his rage can only be appeased by blood.

### HAMLET.

THIS is that Hamlet the Dane whom we read of in our youth, and whom we may be said almost to remember in our after-years; he who made that famous soliloquy on life, who gave the advice to the players, who thought "this goodly frame, the earth," a sterile promontory, and "this brave o'erhanging firmament, the air, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire," "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours;" whom "man delighted not, nor woman neither;" he who talked with the gravediggers, and moralised on

Yorick's skull; the schoolfellow of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at Wittenberg; the friend of Horatio; the lover of Ophelia; he that was mad and sent to England; the slow avenger of his father's death; who lived at the court of Horwendillus five hundred years before we were born, but all whose thoughts we seem to know as well as we do our own, because we have read them in Shakspeare.

Hamlet is a name; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet's brain. What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet. This play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others; whoever has borne about with him the clouded brow of reflection, and thought himself "too much i' th' sun;" whoever has seen the golden lamp of day dimmed by envious mists rising in his own breast, and could find in the world before him only a dull blank with nothing left remarkable in it; whoever has known "the pangs of despised love, the insolence of office, or the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes;" he who has felt his mind sink within him, and sadness cling to his heart like a malady, who has had his hopes blighted and his youth staggered by the apparitions of strange things; who cannot be well at ease, while he sees evil hovering near him like a spectre; whose powers of action have been eaten up by thought, he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing; whose bitterness of soul makes him careless of consequences, and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock representation of them—this is the true Hamlet.

We have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces. But we must make such observations as we can. It is the one of Shakspeare's plays that we think of the oftenest, because it abounds most in striking reflections on human life, and because the distresses of Hamlet are transferred, by the turn of his mind, to the general account of humanity. Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves, because he applies it so himself as a means of general reasoning. He is a great moraliser; and what makes him worth attending to is, that he moralises on his own feelings and experience. He is not a commonplace pedant. If "Lear" is distinguished by the greatest depth of passion, "Hamlet" is the most remarkable for the ingenuity, originality, and unstudied development of character. Shakspeare had more magnanimity than any other poet, and he has shown more of it in this play than in

any other. There is no attempt to force an interest: everything is left for time and circumstances to unfold. The attention is excited without effort, the incidents succeed each other as matters of course, the characters think and speak and act just as they might do if left entirely to themselves. There is no set purpose, no straining at a point. The observations are suggested by the passing scene—the gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. The whole play is an exact transcript of what might be supposed to have taken place at the court of Denmark, at the remote period of time fixed upon, before the modern refinements in morals and manners were heard of. It would have been interesting enough to have been admitted as a bystander in such a scene, at such a time, to have heard and witnessed something of what was going on. But here we are more than spectators. We have not only “the outward pageants and the signs of grief;” but “we have that within which passes show.” We read the thoughts of the heart, we catch the passions living as they rise. Other dramatic writers give us very fine versions and paraphrases of nature; but Shakspeare, together with his own comments, gives us the original text, that we may judge for ourselves. This is a very great advantage.

The character of Hamlet stands quite by itself. It is not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be; but he is a young and princely novice, full of high enthusiasm and quick sensibility—the sport of circumstances, questioning with fortune and refining on his own feelings, and forced from the natural bias of his disposition by the strangeness of his situation. He seems incapable of deliberate action, and is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion, when he has no time to reflect, as in the scene where he kills Polonius, and again, where he alters the letters which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are taking with them to England, purporting his death. At other times, when he is most bound to act, he remains puzzled, undecided, and sceptical, dallies with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and finds out some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtfulness again. For this reason he refuses to kill the King when he is at his prayers, and by a refinement in malice, which is in truth only an excuse for his own want of resolution, defers his revenge to a more fatal opportunity, when he shall be engaged in some act “that has no relish of salvation in it.”

He is the prince of philosophical speculators; and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea

his wish can form, he declines it altogether. So he scruples to trust the suggestions of the Ghost, contrives the scene of the play to have surer proof of his uncle's guilt, and then rests satisfied with this confirmation of his suspicions, and the success of his experiment, instead of acting upon it. Yet he is sensible of his own weakness, taxes himself with it, and tries to reason himself out of it. Still he does nothing; and this very speculation on his own infirmity only affords him another occasion for indulging it. It is not from any want of attachment to his father or of abhorrence of his murder that Hamlet is thus dilatory; but it is more to his taste to indulge his imagination in reflecting upon the enormity of the crime and refining on his schemes of vengeance, than to put them into immediate practice. His ruling passion is to think, not to act; and any vague pretext that flatters this propensity instantly diverts him from his previous purposes.

The moral perfection of this character has been called in question, we think, by those who did not understand it. It is more interesting than according to rules; amiable, though not faultless. The ethical delineations of "that noble and liberal casuist" (as Shakspeare has been well called) do not exhibit the drab-coloured quakerism of morality. His plays are not copied either from the "Whole Duty of Man" or from "The Academy of Compliments!" We confess we are a little shocked at the want of refinement in those who are shocked at the want of refinement in Hamlet. The neglect of punctilious exactness in his behaviour either partakes of the "licence of the time," or else belongs to the very excess of intellectual refinement in the character, which makes the common rules of life, as well as his own purposes, sit loose upon him. He may be said to be amenable only to the tribunal of his own thoughts, and is too much taken up with the airy world of contemplation to lay as much stress as he ought on the practical consequences of things. His habitual principles of action are unhinged and out of joint with the time. His conduct to Ophelia is quite natural in his circumstances. It is that of assumed severity only. It is the effect of disappointed hope, of bitter regrets, of affection suspended, not obliterated, by the distractions of the scene around him! Amidst the natural and preternatural horrors of his situation, he might be excused in delicacy from carrying on a regular courtship. When "his father's spirit was in arms," it was not a time for the son to make love in. He could neither marry Ophelia, nor wound her mind by explaining the cause of his alienation, which he durst hardly trust himself to think of. It would have taken him years to have come to a direct explanation on the point. In the harassed

state of his mind, he could not have done much otherwise than he did. His conduct does not contradict what he says when he sees her funeral :

“I loved Ophelia : forty thousand brothers  
Could not with all their quantity of love  
Make up my sum.”

Nothing can be more affecting or beautiful than the Queen's apostrophe to Ophelia on throwing the flowers into the grave :

“Sweets to the sweet, farewell. *[Scattering flowers.]*  
I hop'd thou should'st have been my Hamlet's wife ;  
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,  
And not have strew'd thy grave.”

Shakspeare was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of human character, and he here shows us the Queen, who was so criminal in some respects, not without sensibility and affection in other relations of life.—Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. Oh rose of May, oh flower too soon faded ! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakspeare could have drawn in the way that he has done, and to the conception of which there is not even the smallest approach, except in some of the old romantic ballads.

### ROMEO AND JULIET.

“ROMEO AND JULIET” is the only tragedy which Shakspeare has written entirely on a love-story. It is supposed to have been his first play, and it deserves to stand in that proud rank. There is the buoyant spirit of youth in every line, in the rapturous intoxication of hope, and in the bitterness of despair. It has been said of “Romeo and Juliet” by a great critic, that “whatever is most intoxicating in the odour of a southern spring, languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous in the first opening of the rose, is to be found in this poem.” The description is true ; and yet it does not answer to our idea of the play. For if it has the sweetness of the rose, it has its freshness too ; if it has the languor of the nightingale's song, it has also its giddy transport ; if it has the softness of a southern spring, it is as glowing and as bright. There is nothing of a sickly and sentimental cast. Romeo and Juliet are in love, but they are not love-sick. Everything speaks the very soul of pleasure, the high and healthy pulse of the passions : the heart beats, the blood circulates and mantles throughout. Their courtship

is not an insipid interchange of sentiments lip-deep, learnt at second-hand from poems and plays,—made up of beauties of the most shadowy kind, of “fancies wan that hang the pensive head,” of evanescent smiles, and sighs that breathe not, of delicacy that shrinks from the touch, and feebleness that scarce supports itself, an elaborate vacuity of thought, and an artificial dearth of sense, spirit, truth, and nature! It is the reverse of all this. It is Shakspeare all over, and Shakspeare when he was young.

We have heard it objected to “Romeo and Juliet,” that it is founded on an idle passion between a boy and a girl, who have scarcely seen and can have but little sympathy or rational esteem for one another, who have had no experience of the good or ills of life, and whose raptures or despair must be therefore equally groundless and fantastical. Whoever objects to the youth of the parties in this play as “too unripe and crude” to pluck the sweets of love, and wishes to see a first-love carried on into a good old age, and the passions taken at the rebound, when their force is spent, may find all this done in “The Stranger” and in other German plays, where they do things by contraries, and transpose nature to inspire sentiment and create philosophy. Shakspeare proceeded in a more straightforward and, we think, effectual way. He did not endeavour to extract beauty from wrinkles, or the wild throb of passion from the last expiring sigh of indifference. He did not “gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles.” It was not his way. But he has given a picture of human life, such as it is in the order of nature. He has founded the passion of the two lovers not on the pleasures they had experienced, but on all the pleasures they had *not* experienced. All that was to come of life was theirs. At that untried source of promised happiness they slaked their thirst, and the first eager draught made them drunk with love and joy. They were in full possession of their senses and their affections. Their hopes were of air, their desires of fire. Youth is the season of love, because the heart is then first melted in tenderness from the touch of novelty, and kindled to rapture, for it knows no end of its enjoyments or its wishes. Desire has no limit but itself. Passion, the love and expectation of pleasure, is infinite, extravagant, inexhaustible, till experience comes to check and kill it. Juliet exclaims on her first interview with Romeo:

“ My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
My love as deep.”

And why should it not? What was to hinder the thrilling tide of pleasure, which had just gushed from her heart, from flowing on



without stint or measure but experience, which she was yet without? What was to abate the transport of the first sweet sense of pleasure, which her heart and her senses had just tasted, but indifference which she was yet a stranger to? What was there to check the ardour of hope, of faith, of constancy, just rising in her breast, but disappointment which she had not yet felt? As are the desires and the hopes of youthful passion, such is the keenness of its disappointments, and their baleful effect. Such is the transition in this play from the highest bliss to the lowest despair, from the nuptial couch to an untimely grave. The only evil that even in apprehension befalls the two lovers is the loss of the greatest possible felicity; yet this loss is fatal to both, for they had rather part with life than bear the thought of surviving all that had made life dear to them. In all this, Shakspeare has but followed nature, which existed in his time, as well as now. The modern philosophy, which reduces the whole theory of the mind to habitual impressions, and leaves the natural impulses of passion and imagination out of the account, had not then been discovered; or if it had, would have been little calculated for the uses of poetry.

#### LEAR.

WE wish that we could pass this play over, and say nothing about it. All that we can say must fall far short of the subject; or even of what we ourselves conceive of it. To attempt to give a description of the play itself or of its effect upon the mind, is mere impertinence: yet we must say something. It is, then, the best of all Shakspeare's plays, for it is the one in which he was the most in earnest. He was here fairly caught in the web of his own imagination. The passion which he has taken as his subject is that which strikes its root deepest into the human heart; of which the bond is the hardest to be unloosed; and the cancelling and tearing to pieces of which gives the greatest revulsion to the frame. This depth of nature, this force of passion, this tug and war of the elements of our being, this firm faith in filial piety, and the giddy anarchy and whirling tumult of the thoughts at finding this prop failing it, the contrast between the fixed, immovable basis of natural affection and the rapid, irregular starts of imagination, suddenly wrenched from all its accustomed holds and resting-places in the soul, this is what Shakspeare has given, and what nobody else but he could give. So we believe. The mind of Lear, staggering between the weight of attachment and the hurried movements of passion, is like a tall ship driven about by the winds, buffeted by the furious waves, but

that still rides above the storm, having its anchor fixed in the bottom of the sea; or it is like the sharp rock circled by the eddying whirlpool that foams and beats against it, or like the solid promontory pushed from its basis by the force of an earthquake.

The character of Lear itself is very finely conceived for the purpose. It is the only ground on which such a story could be built with the greatest truth and effect. It is his rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him. The part which Cordelia bears in the scene is extremely beautiful: the story is almost told in the first words she utters. We see at once the precipice on which the poor old king stands from his own extravagant and credulous importunity, the indiscreet simplicity of her love (which, to be sure, has a little of her father's obstinacy in it), and the hollowness of her sisters' pretensions. Almost the first burst of that noble tide of passion which runs through the play is in the remonstrance of Kent to his royal master on the injustice of his sentence against his youngest daughter: "Be Kent unmannerly, when Lear is mad!" This manly plainness, which draws down on him the displeasure of the unadvised king, is worthy of the fidelity with which he adheres to his fallen fortunes. The true character of the two eldest daughters, Regan and Goneril (they are so thoroughly hateful that we do not even like to repeat their names), breaks out in their answer to Cordelia, who desires them to treat their father well: "Prescribe not us our duties"—their hatred of advice being in proportion to their determination to do wrong, and to their hypocritical pretensions to do right. Their deliberate hypocrisy adds the last finishing to the odiousness of their characters.

It has been said, and we think justly, that the third act of "Othello" and the three first acts of "Lear" are Shakspeare's great masterpieces in the logic of passion: that they contain the highest examples not only of the force of individual passion, but of its dramatic vicissitudes and striking effects arising from the different circumstances and characters of the persons speaking. We see the ebb and flow of the feeling, its pauses and feverish starts, its impatience of opposition, its accumulating force when it has time to recollect itself, the manner in which it avails itself of every passing word or gesture, its haste to repel insinuation, the alternate contraction and dilatation of the soul, and all "the dazzling fence of controversy" in this mortal combat with poisoned weapons, aimed at the heart, where each wound is fatal. We have seen in "Othello" how the unsuspecting frankness and impetuous passions of the Moor

are played upon and exasperated by the artful dexterity of Iago. In the present play, that which aggravates the sense of sympathy in the reader, and of uncontrollable anguish in the swollen heart of Lear, is the petrifying indifference, the cold, calculating, obdurate selfishness of his daughters. His keen passions seem whetted on their stony hearts. The contrast would be too painful, the shock too great, but for the intervention of the Fool, whose well-timed levity comes in to break the continuity of feeling when it can no longer be borne, and to bring into play again the fibres of the heart just as they are growing rigid from overstrained excitement. The imagination is glad to take refuge in the half-comic, half-serious comments of the Fool, just as the mind under the extreme anguish of a surgical operation vents itself in sallies of wit. The character was also a grotesque ornament of the barbarous times, in which alone the tragic groundwork of the story could be laid. In another point of view it is indispensable, inasmuch as, while it is a diversion to the too great intensity of our disgust, it carries the pathos to the highest pitch of which it is capable, by showing the pitiable weakness of the old king's conduct and its irretrievable consequences in the most familiar point of view. Lear may well "beat at the gate which let his folly in," after, as the Fool says, "he has made his daughters his mothers." The character is dropped in the third act to make room for the entrance of Edgar as Mad Tom, which well accords with the increasing bustle and wildness of the incidents; and nothing can be more complete than the distinction between Lear's real and Edgar's assumed madness, while the resemblance in the cause of their distresses, from the severing of the nearest ties of natural affection, keeps up a unity of interest. Shakspeare's mastery over his subject, if it was not art, was owing to a knowledge of the connecting-links of the passions, and their effect upon the mind, still more wonderful than any systematic adherence to rules, and that anticipated and outdid all the efforts of the most refined art, not inspired and rendered instinctive by genius. . . .

When Lear dies, indeed, we feel the truth of what Kent says on the occasion—

" Vex not his ghost : O let him pass ! he hates him,  
That would upon the rack of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer."

Yet a happy ending has been contrived for this play, which is approved of by Dr. Johnson and condemned by Schlegel. A better authority than either on any subject in which poetry and feeling are

concerned—Mr. Charles Lamb—has given it in favour of Shakspeare, in some remarks on the acting of Lear, with which we shall conclude this account:—

“The ‘Lear’ of Shakspeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery with which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements than any actor can be to represent Lear. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual; the explosions of his passions are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that rich sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it we see not Lear, but we are Lear;—we are in his mind: we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason we discover a mighty, irregular power of reasoning, immethodised from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will on the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks or tones to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of *the heavens themselves*, when in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children he reminds them that ‘they themselves are old’? What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things? But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it show: it is too hard and stony: it must have love-scenes, and a happy ending. It is not enough that Cordelia is a daughter, she must shine as a lover too. Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the showmen of the scene, to draw it about more easily. A happy ending!—as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through,—the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world’s burden after, why all this pudder and preparation—why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station,—as if at his years and with his experience, anything was left but to die.”

## FALSTAFF.

IF Shakspeare's fondness for the ludicrous sometimes led to faults in his tragedies (which was not often the case), he has made us amends by the character of Falstaff. This is perhaps the most substantial comic character that ever was invented. Sir John carries a most portly presence in the mind's eye; and in him, not to speak it profanely, "we behold the fulness of the spirit of wit and humour bodily." We are as well acquainted with his person as his mind, and his jokes come upon us with double force and relish from the quantity of flesh through which they make their way, as he shakes his fat sides with laughter, or "lards the lean earth as he walks along." Other comic characters seem, if we approach and handle them, to resolve themselves into air, "into thin air;" but this is embodied and palpable to the grossest apprehension: it lies "three fingers deep upon the ribs," it plays about the lungs and diaphragm with all the force of animal enjoyment. His body is like a good estate to his mind, from which he receives rents and revenues of profit and pleasure in kind, according to its extent and the richness of the soil. Wit is often a meagre substitute for pleasurable sensation; an effusion of spleen and petty spite at the comforts of others, from feeling none in itself. Falstaff's wit is an emanation of a fine constitution; an exuberance of good-humour and good-nature; an overflowing of his love of laughter and good-fellowship; a giving vent to his heart's ease, and over-contentment with himself and others. He would not be in character if he were not so fat as he is; for there is the greatest keeping in the boundless luxury of his imagination and the pampered self-indulgence of his physical appetites. He manures and nourishes his mind with jests, as he does his body with sack and sugar. He carves out his jokes as he would a capon or a haunch of venison, where there is *cut and come again*, and pours out upon them the oil of gladness. His tongue drops fatness, and in the chambers of his brain "it snows of meat and drink." He keeps up perpetual holiday and open house, and we live with him in a round of invitations to a rump and dozen. Yet we are not to suppose that he was a mere sensualist. All this is as much in imagination as in reality. His sensuality does not engross and stupefy his other faculties, but "ascends me into the brain, dries me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapours which environ it, makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes." His imagination keeps up the ball after his senses have done with it. He seems to have

even a greater enjoyment of the freedom from restraint, of good cheer, of his ease, of his vanity, in the ideal exaggerated description which he gives of them, than in fact. He never fails to enrich his discourse with allusions to eating and drinking, but we never see him at table. He carries his own larder about with him, and he is himself "a tun of man." His pulling out the bottle in the field of battle is a joke to show his contempt for glory accompanied with danger, his systematic adherence to his Epicurean philosophy in the most trying circumstances. Again, such is his deliberate exaggeration of his own vices, that it does not seem quite certain whether the account of his hostess's bill, found in his pocket, with such an out-of-the-way charge for capons and sack with only one halfpenny-worth of bread, was not put there by himself as a trick to humour the jest upon his favourite propensities, and as a conscious caricature of himself. He is represented as a liar, a braggart, a coward, a glutton, &c., and yet we are not offended but delighted with him; for he is all these as much to amuse others as to gratify himself. He openly assumes all these characters to show the humorous part of them. The unrestrained indulgence of his own ease, appetites, and convenience has neither malice nor hypocrisy in it. In a word, he is an actor in himself almost as much as upon the stage, and we no more object to the character of Falstaff in a moral point of view than we should think of bringing an excellent comedian, who should represent him to the life, before one of the police-offices. We only consider the number of pleasant lights in which he puts certain foibles (the more pleasant as they are opposed to the received rules and necessary restraints of society), and do not trouble ourselves about the consequences resulting from them, for no mischievous consequences do result. Sir John is old as well as fat, which gives a melancholy retrospective tinge to the character; and by the disparity between his inclinations and his capacity for enjoyment, makes it still more ludicrous and fantastical.

The secret of Falstaff's wit is for the most part a masterly presence of mind, an absolute self-possession, which nothing can disturb. His repartees are involuntary suggestions of his self-love; instinctive evasions of everything that threatens to interrupt the career of his triumphant jollity and self-complacency. His very size floats him out of all his difficulties in a sea of rich conceits; and he turns round on the pivot of his convenience, with every occasion and at a moment's warning. His natural repugnance to every unpleasant thought or circumstance, of itself makes light of objections, and provokes the most extravagant and licentious answers in his own justification. His indifference to truth puts no check upon his

invention, and the more improbable and unexpected his contrivances are, the more happily does he seem to be delivered of them, the anticipation of their effect acting as a stimulus to the gaiety of his fancy. The success of one adventurous sally gives him spirits to undertake another: he deals always in round numbers, and his exaggerations and excuses are "open, palpable, monstrous as the father that begets them."

[*A View of the English Stage ; or a Series of Dramatic Criticisms*, 1818.]

### THE ACTING OF KEAN.

. . . I WENT to see him the first night of his appearing in Shylock. I remember it well. The boxes were empty, and the pit not half-full: "some quantity of barren spectators and idle renters were thinly scattered to make up a show." The whole presented a dreary, hopeless aspect. I was in considerable apprehension for the result. From the first scene in which Mr. Kean came on my doubts were at an end. I had been told to give as favourable an account as I could: I gave a true one. I am not one of those who, when they see the sun breaking from behind a cloud, stop to ask others whether it is the moon. Mr. Kean's appearance was the first gleam of genius breaking athwart the gloom of the Stage, and the public have since gladly basked in its ray, in spite of actors, managers, and critics. . . .

Mr. Kean (of whom report had spoken highly) last night<sup>1</sup> made his appearance at Drury Lane Theatre in the character of Shylock. For voice, eye, action, and expression no actor has come out for many years at all equal to him. The applause, from the first scene to the last, was general, loud, and uninterrupted. Indeed, the very first scene in which he comes on with Bassanio and Antonio showed the master in his art, and at once decided the opinion of the audience. Perhaps it was the most perfect of any. Notwithstanding the complete success of Mr. Kean in the part of Shylock we question whether he will not become a greater favourite in other parts. There was a lightness and vigour in his tread, a buoyancy and elasticity of spirit, a fire and animation, which would accord better with almost any other character than with the morose, sullen, inward, inveterate, inflexible malignity of Shylock. The character of Shylock is that of a man brooding over one idea, that

<sup>1</sup> January 26, 1814.

of its wrongs, and bent on one unalterable purpose, that of revenge. In conveying a profound impression of this feeling, or in embodying the general conception of rigid and uncontrollable self-will, equally proof against every sentiment of humanity or prejudice of opinion, we have seen actors more successful than Mr. Kean; but in giving effect to the conflict of passions arising out of the contrasts of situation, in varied vehemence of declamation, in keenness of sarcasm, in the rapidity of his transitions from one tone and feeling to another, in propriety and novelty of action, presenting a succession of striking pictures, and giving perpetually fresh shocks of delight and surprise, it would be difficult to single out a competitor. The fault of his acting was (if we may hazard the objection) an over-display of the resources of the art, which gave too much relief to the hard, impenetrable, dark groundwork of the character of Shylock. It would be endless to point out individual beauties, where almost every passage was received with equal and deserved applause. We thought, in one or two instances, the pauses in the voice were too long, and too great a reliance placed on the expression of the countenance, which is a language intelligible only to a part of the house. . . .

. . . Mr. Kean's Othello is his best character, and the highest effort of genius on the stage. We say this without any exception or reserve. Yet we wish it was better than it is. In parts, we think he rises as high as human genius can go: at other times, though powerful, the whole effort is thrown away in a wrong direction, and disturbs our idea of the character. There are some technical objections. Othello was tall; but that is nothing: he was black; but that is nothing. But he was not fierce, and that is everything. It is only in the last agony of human suffering that he gives way to his rage and his despair, and it is in working his noble nature up to that extremity that Shakspeare has shown his genius and his vast power over the human heart. It was in raising passion to its height, from the lowest beginnings and in spite of all obstacles, in showing the conflict of the soul, the tug and war between love and hatred, rage, tenderness, jealousy, remorse, in laying open the strength and the weaknesses of human nature, in uniting sublimity of thought with the anguish of the keenest woe, in putting in motion all the springs and impulses which make up this our mortal being, and at last blending them in that noble tide of deep and sustained passion, impetuous but majestic, "that flows on to the Propontic and knows no ebb," that the great excellence of Shakspeare lay. Mr. Kean is in general all passion, all energy, all relentless will. He wants imagination, that faculty which contemplates



events, and broods over feelings with a certain calmness and grandeur; his feelings almost always hurry on to action, and hardly ever repose upon themselves. He is too often in the highest key of passion, too uniformly on the verge of extravagance, too constantly on the rack. This does very well in certain characters, as Zanga or Bajazet, where there is merely a physical passion, a boiling of the blood to be expressed, but it is not so in the lofty-minded and generous Moor.

We make these remarks the more freely, because there were parts of the character in which Mr. Kean showed the greatest sublimity and pathos, by laying aside all violence of action. For instance, the tone of voice in which he delivered the beautiful apostrophe, "Then, oh, farewell!" struck on the heart like the swelling notes of some divine music, like the sound of years of departed happiness. Why not all so, or all that is like it? Why not speak the affecting passage, "I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips"—why not speak the last speech, in the same manner? They are both of them, we do most strenuously contend, speeches of pure pathos, of thought and feeling, and not of passion, venting itself in violence of action or gesture. Again, the look, the action, the expression of voice, with which he accompanied the exclamation, "Not a jot, not a jot," was perfectly heart-rending. His vow of revenge against Cassio and his abandonment of his love for Desdemona were as fine as possible. The whole of the third act had an irresistible effect upon the house, and indeed is only to be paralleled by the murder-scene in "Macbeth." . . .

### MRS. SIDDONS.

. . . THE homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to Queens. The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it; she was regarded less with admiration than with wonder, as if a being of a superior order had dropped from another sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. She raised Tragedy to the skies, or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature. We can conceive of nothing grander. She embodied to our imagination the fables of mythology, of the heroic and deified mortals of elder time. She was not less than a goddess, or than a prophetess inspired by the gods. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine. She was Tragedy personified. She was the stateliest ornament of the public mind. She was not only the idol of the people, she not only hushed the tumultuous shouts of the pit in

breathless expectation, and quenched the blaze of surrounding beauty in silent tears, but to the retired and lonely student, through long years of solitude, her face has shone as if an eye had appeared from heaven; her name has been as if a voice had opened the chambers of the human heart, or as if a trumpet had awakened the sleeping and the dead. To have seen Mrs. Siddons was an event in every one's life. . . .

Mrs. Siddons's appearance in *Lady Macbeth* at this theatre on Thursday drew immense crowds to every part of the house. We should suppose that more than half the number of persons were compelled to return without gaining admittance. We succeeded in gaining a seat in one of the back-boxes, and saw this wonderful performance at a distance, and consequently at a disadvantage. Though the distance of place is a disadvantage to a performance like Mrs. Siddons's *Lady Macbeth*, we question whether the distance of time at which we have formerly seen it is any. It is nearly twenty years since we first saw her in this character, and certainly the impression which we have still left on our minds from that first exhibition is stronger than the one we received the other evening. The sublimity of Mrs. Siddons's acting is such, that the first impulse which it gives to the mind can never wear out, and we doubt whether this original and paramount impression is not weakened, rather than strengthened, by subsequent repetition; if we have seen Mrs. Siddons in *Lady Macbeth* only once, it is enough. The impression is stamped there for ever, and any after-experiments and critical inquiries only serve to fritter away and tamper with the sacredness of the early recollection.

[*Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*, 1819.]

## DISSENTERS AND DISSENTING MINISTERS.

. . . WE are told that the different sects are hot-beds of sedition, because they are nurseries of public spirit, and independence, and sincerity of opinion in all other respects. They are so necessarily, and by the supposition. They are Dissenters from the Established Church; they submit voluntarily to certain privations, they incur a certain portion of obloquy and ill-will, for the sake of what they believe to be the truth: they are not time-servers on the face of the evidence, and that is sufficient to expose them to the instinctive hatred and ready ribaldry of those who think venality the first of

virtues, and prostitution of principle the best sacrifice a man can make to the Graces or his Country. The Dissenter does not change his sentiments with the seasons: he does not suit his conscience to his convenience. This is enough to condemn him for a pestilent fellow. He will not give up his principles because they are unfashionable; therefore he is not to be trusted. He speaks his mind bluntly and honestly; therefore he is a secret disturber of the peace, a dark conspirator against the State. On the contrary, the different sects in this country are, or have been, the steadiest supporters of its liberties and laws: they are checks and barriers against the insidious or avowed encroachments of arbitrary power, as effectual and indispensable as any others in the Constitution: they are depositaries of a principle as sacred and somewhat rarer than a devotion to Court-influence—we mean the love of truth. It is hard for any one to be an honest politician who is not born and bred a Dissenter. Nothing else can sufficiently inure and steel a man against the prevailing prejudices of the world but that habit of mind which arises from non-conformity to its decisions in matters of religion. There is a natural alliance between the love of civil and religious liberty, as much as between Church and State. Protestantism was the first school of political liberty in Europe: Presbyterianism has been one great support of it in England. The sectary in religion is taught to appeal to his own bosom for the truth and sincerity of his opinions, and to arm himself with stern indifference to what others think of them. This will no doubt often produce a certain hardness of manner and cold repulsiveness of feeling in trifling matters, but it is the only sound discipline of truth, or inflexible honesty in politics as well as in religion. The same principle of independent inquiry and unbiassed conviction which makes him reject all undue interference between his Maker and his conscience will give a character of uprightness and disregard of personal consequences to his conduct and sentiments in what concerns the most important relations between man and man. He neither subscribes to the dogmas of priests nor truckles to the mandates of Ministers. He has a rigid sense of duty which renders him superior to the caprice, the prejudices, and the injustice of the world; and the same habitual consciousness of rectitude of purpose which leads him to rely for his self-respect on the testimony of his own heart enables him to disregard the groundless malice and rash judgments of his opponents. It is in vain for him to pay his court to the world, to fawn upon power; he labours under certain insurmountable disabilities for becoming a candidate for its favour: he dares to contradict its opinion and to condemn its usages in the most important article of all. The world will always

look cold and askance upon him ; and therefore he may defy it with less fear of its censures.

Dissenters are the safest partisans and the steadiest friends. Indeed, they are almost the only people who have an idea of an abstract attachment to a cause or to individuals, from a sense of fidelity, independently of prosperous or adverse circumstances, and in spite of opposition. No patriotism, no public spirit, not reared in that inclement sky and harsh soil, in "*the hortus siccus* of Dissent," will generally last : it will either bend in the storm or droop in the sunshine. *Non ex quovis ligno fit Mercurius*. You cannot engraft a medlar on a crab-apple. A thoroughbred Dissenter will never make an accomplished courtier. . . .

. . . We have known some such [Dissenting ministers] in happier days, who had been brought up and lived from youth to age in the one constant belief of God and of His Christ, and who thought all other things but dross compared with the glory hereafter to be revealed. Their youthful hopes and vanity had been mortified in them, even in their boyish days, by the neglect and supercilious regards of the world ; and they turned to look into their own minds for something else to build their hopes and confidence upon. They were true Priests. They set up an image in their own minds—it was truth : they worshipped an idol there—it was justice. They looked on man as their brother, and only bowed the knee to the Highest. Separate from the world, they walked humbly with their God, and lived in thought with those who had borne testimony of a good conscience, with the spirits of just men in all ages. They saw Moses when he slew the Egyptian, and the Prophets who overturned the brazen images, and those who were stoned and sawn asunder. They were with Daniel in the lions' den, and with the three children who passed through the fiery furnace, Meshech, Shadrach, and Abed-nego ; they did not crucify Christ twice over, or deny Him in their hearts, with St. Peter ; the "Book of Martyrs" was open to them, they read the story of William Tell, of John Huss and Jerome of Prague, and the old one-eyed Zisca ; they had Neale's "History of the Puritans" by heart, and Calamy's "Account of the Two Thousand Ejected Ministers," and gave it to their children to read, with the pictures of the polemical Baxter, the silver-tongued Bates, the mild-looking Calamy, and old honest Howe ; they believed in Lardner's "Credibility of the Gospel History ;" they were deep-read in the works of the *Frates Poloni*, Pripsevius, Crellius, Cracovius, who sought out truth in texts of Scripture, and grew blind over Hebrew points, their aspiration after liberty was a sigh uttered from the towers, "time-rent," of the Holy Inquisition ; and their zeal for religious

toleration was kindled at the fires of Smithfield. Their sympathy was not with the oppressors but the oppressed. They cherished in their thoughts—and wished to transmit to their posterity—those rights and privileges for asserting which their ancestors had bled on scaffolds, or had pined in dungeons or in foreign climes. Their creed, too, was “Glory to God, peace on earth, good-will to man.” This creed, since profaned and rendered vile, they kept fast through good report and evil report. This belief they had, that looks at something out of itself, fixed as the stars, deep as the firmament, that makes of its own heart an altar to truth, a place of worship for what is right, at which it does reverence with praise and prayer like a holy thing, apart and content; that feels that the greatest Being in the universe is always near it, and that all things work together for the good of His creatures, under His guiding hand. This covenant they kept, as the stars keep their courses; this principle they stuck by, for want of knowing better, as it sticks by them to the last. It grew with their growth, it does not wither in their decay. It lives when the almond-tree flourishes, and is not bowed down with the tottering knees. It glimmers with the last feeble eyesight, smiles in the faded cheek like infancy, and lights a path before them to the grave.

## THE CHURCH AND ITS CLERGY.

. . . THE bane of all religions has been the necessity (real or supposed) of keeping up an attention and attaching a value to external forms and ceremonies. It was, of course, much easier to conform to these, or to manifest a reverence for them, than to practise the virtues or understand the doctrines of true religion, of which they were merely the outward types and symbols. The consequence has been, that the greatest stress has been perpetually laid on what was of the least value and most easily professed. The form of religion has superseded the substance; the means have supplanted the end; and the sterling coin of charity and good works has been driven out of the currency, for the base counterfeits of superstition and intolerance, by all the money-changers and dealers in the temples established to religion throughout the world. Vestments and chalices have been multiplied for the reception of the Holy Spirit; the tagged points of controversy and lacquered varnish of hypocrisy have eaten into the solid substance and texture of piety; “and all the inward acts of worship, issuing from the native strength

of the soul, run out (as Milton expresses it) lavishly to the upper skin, and there harden into the crust of formality." Hence we have had such shoals of

"Eremites and Friars  
White, black, and grey, with all their trumpery"—

who have foisted their "idiot and embryo" inventions upon us for truth, and who have fomented all the bad passions of the heart, and let loose all the mischiefs of war, of fire and famine, to avenge the slightest difference of opinion on any one iota of their lying creeds, or the slightest disrespect to any one of those mummeries and idle pageants which they had set up as sacred idols for the world to wonder at. We do not forget, in making these remarks, that there was a time when the persons who will be most annoyed and scandalised at them would have taken a more effectual mode of showing their zeal and indignation; when to have expressed a free opinion on a monk's cowl or a Cardinal's hat would have exposed the writer who had been guilty of such sacrilege to the pains and penalties of excommunication: to be burnt to an *auto da fe*; to be consigned to the dungeons of the Inquisition, or doomed to the mines of Spanish America; to have his nose slit, or his ears cut off, or his hand reduced to a stump. Such were the considerate and humane proceedings by which the priests of former times vindicated their own honour, which they pretended to be the honour of God. Such was their humility, when they had the power. . . .

### THE ESTABLISHED CLERGY.

. . . THE Established Clergy of any religion are bound to conform their professions of religious belief to a certain popular and lucrative standard, and bound over to keep the peace by certain articles of faith. It is a rare felicity in any one who gives his attention fairly and freely to the subject, and has read the Scriptures, the Misnah, and the Talmud—the Fathers, the Schoolmen, the Socinian divines, the Lutheran and Calvinistic controversy, with innumerable volumes appertaining thereto and illustrative thereof, to believe all the Thirty-nine Articles, "except one." If those who are destined for the episcopal office exercise their understandings honestly and openly upon every one of these questions, how little chance is there that they should come to the same conclusion upon them all! If they do not inquire, what becomes of their independence of under-

standing? If they conform to what they do not believe, what becomes of their honesty? Their estimation in the world, as well as their livelihood, depends on their tamely submitting their understanding to authority at first, and on their not seeing reason to alter their opinion afterwards. Is it likely that a man will intrepidly open his eyes to conviction when he sees poverty and disgrace staring him in the face as the inevitable consequence? . . .

Take one illustration of the truth of all that has been here said, and of more that might be said, upon the subject. It is related in that valuable comment on the present reign and the existing order of things, Bishop Watson's *Life*, that the late Dr. Paley, having at one time to maintain a thesis in the University, proposed to the Bishop, for his approbation, the following:—"That the Eternity of Hell torments is contradictory to the goodness of God." The Bishop observed, that he thought this a bold doctrine to maintain in the face of the Church; but Paley persisted in his determination. Soon after, however, having sounded the opinions of certain persons high in authority and well read in the orthodoxy of preferment, he came back in great alarm, said he found the thing would not do, and begged, instead of his first thesis, to have the reverse one substituted in its stead, viz.—"That the Eternity of Hell torments is *not* contradictory to the goodness of God." What burning daylight is here thrown on clerical discipline and the bias of a University education! This passage is worth all Mosheim's "*Ecclesiastical History*," Wood's "*Athenæ Oxonienses*," and Mr. Coleridge's two "*Lay Sermons*." This same shuffling divine is the same Dr. Paley who afterwards employed the whole of his life, and his moderate second-hand abilities, in tampering with religion, morality, and politics,—in trimming between his convenience and his conscience,—in crawling between heaven and earth, and trying to cajole both. His celebrated and popular work on *Moral Philosophy* is celebrated and popular for no other reason, than that it is a somewhat ingenious and amusing apology for existing abuses of every description, by which anything is to be got. It is a very elaborate and consolatory elucidation of the text, *that men should not quarrel with their bread and butter*. It is not an attempt to show what is right, but to palliate and find out plausible excuses for what is wrong. It is a work without the least value, except as a convenient commonplace book or *vade mecum* for tyro politicians and young divines, to smooth their progress in the Church or the State. This work is a text-book in the University. . . .

[*Letter to William Gifford, Esq., 1819.*]

[If ever an author was justified in attacking an unscrupulous critic, it was Hazlitt. The reader, after perusing what has been said on this subject in the Memoir prefixed to this volume, will not be surprised at the indignant tone of the letter. I have only given the introductory pages. The "bringing to book" of the slanderer is a fine specimen of trenchant exposure.]

SIR,—You have an ugly trick of saying what is not true of any one you do not like; and it will be the object of this letter to cure you of it. You say what you please of others: it is time you were told what you are. In doing this, give me leave to borrow the familiarity of your style:—for the fidelity of the picture I shall be answerable.

You are a little person, but a considerable cat's-paw; and so far worthy of notice. Your clandestine connection with persons high in office constantly influences your opinions, and alone gives importance to them. You are the *Government Critic*, a character nicely differing from that of a Government spy—the invisible link that connects literature with the police. It is your business to keep a strict eye over all writers who differ in opinion with His Majesty's Ministers, and to measure their talents and attainments by the standard of their servility and meanness. For this office you are well qualified. Besides being the Editor of the *Quarterly Review*, you are also paymaster of the band of Gentlemen Pensioners; and when an author comes before you in the one capacity, with whom you are not acquainted in the other, you know how to deal with him. You have your cue beforehand. The distinction between truth and falsehood you make no account of: you mind only the distinction between Whig and Tory. Accustomed to the indulgence of your mercenary virulence and party-spite, you have lost all relish as well as capacity for the unperverted exercises of the understanding, and make up for the obvious want of ability by a barefaced want of principle. The same set of threadbare commonplaces, the same second-hand assortment of abusive nick-names, the same assumption of little magisterial airs of superiority, are regularly repeated; and the ready convenient lie comes in aid of the dearth of other resources, and passes off, with impunity, in the garb of religion and loyalty. If no one finds it out, why then there is no harm done—*snug's the word*; or if it should be detected, it is a good joke, shows spirit and invention in proportion to its grossness and impudence, and it is only a pity that what was so well meant in



so good a cause should miscarry! The end sanctifies the means; and you keep no faith with heretics in religion or government. You are under the protection of the *Court*; and your zeal for your king and country entitles you to say what you choose of every public writer who does not do all in his power to pamper the one into a tyrant, and to trample the other into a herd of slaves. You derive your weight with the great and powerful from the very circumstance that takes away all real weight from your authority, viz., that it is avowedly, and upon every occasion, exerted for no one purpose but to hold up to hatred and contempt whatever opposes in the slightest degree and in the most flagrant instances of abuse their pride and passions. You dictate your opinions to a party, because not one of your opinions is formed upon an honest conviction of the truth or justice of the case, but by collusion with the prejudices, caprice, interest, or vanity of your employers. The mob of well-dressed readers who consult the *Quarterly Review* know that *there is no offence in it*. They put faith in it because they are aware that it is "false and hollow, but will please the ear;" that it will tell them nothing but what they would wish to believe. Your reasoning comes under the head of Court-news; your taste is a standard of the prevailing *ton* in certain circles, like Ackerman's dresses for May. When you damn an author, one knows that he is not a favourite at Carlton House. When you say that an author cannot write common sense or English, you mean that he does not believe in the doctrine of *divine right*. Of course, the clergy and gentry will not read such an author. Your praise or blame has nothing to do with the merits of a work, but with the party to which the writer belongs, or is in the inverse ratio of its merits. The dingy cover that wraps the pages of the *Quarterly Review* does not contain a concentrated essence of taste and knowledge, but is a receptacle for the scum and sediment of all the prejudice, bigotry, ill-will, ignorance, and rancour afloat in the kingdom. This the fools and knaves who pin their faith on you know, and it is on this account they pin their faith on you. They come to you for a scale not of literary talent, but of political subserviency. They want you to set your mark of approbation on a writer as a thorough-paced tool, or of reprobation as an honest man. Your fashionable readers, Sir, are hypocrites as well as knaves and fools; and the watchword, the practical intelligence they want, must be conveyed to them without implied offence to their candour and liberality, in the *patois* and gibberish of fraud of which you are a master. When you begin to jabber about common sense and English, they know what to be at, shut up the book, and wonder that any respectable publisher can

be found to let it lie on his counter, as much as if it were a Petition for Reform. . . . There is something in your nature and habits that fits you for the situation into which your good fortune has thrown you. In the first place, you are in no danger of exciting the jealousy of your patrons by a mortifying display of extraordinary talents, while your sordid devotion to their will and to your own interest at once ensures their gratitude and contempt. To crawl and lick the dust is all they expect of you, and all you can do. Otherwise they might fear your power, for they could have no dependence on your fidelity: but they take you with safety and with fondness to their bosoms; for they know that if you cease to be a tool you cease to be anything. If you had an exuberance of wit, the unguarded use of it might sometimes glance at your employers; if you were sincere yourself, you might respect the motives of others; if you had sufficient understanding, you might attempt an argument, and fail in it. But luckily for yourself and your admirers, you are but the dull ocho, "the tenth transmitter" of some hackneyed jest: the want of all manly and candid feeling in yourself only excites your suspicion and antipathy to it in others, as something at which your nature recoils; your slowness to understand makes you quick to misrepresent; and you infallibly make nonsense of what you cannot possibly conceive. What seem your wilful blunders are often the felicity of natural parts, and your want of penetration has all the appearance of an affected petulance!

Again, of an humble origin yourself, you recommend your performances to persons of fashion by always abusing *low people*, with the smartness of a lady's waiting-woman and the independent spirit of a travelling tutor. Raised from the lowest rank to your present despicable eminence in the world of letters, you are indignant that any one should attempt to rise into notice, except by the same regular trammels and servile gradations, or should go about to separate the stamp of merit from the badge of sycophancy. The silent listener in select circles, and menial tool of noble families, you have become the oracle of Church and State. The purveyor to the prejudices or passions of a private patron succeeds, by no other title, to regulate the public taste. You have felt the inconveniences of poverty, and look up with base and grovelling admiration to the advantages of wealth and power: you have had to contend with the mechanical difficulties of a want of education, and you see nothing in learning but its mechanical uses. A self-taught man naturally becomes a pedant, and mistakes the means of knowledge for the end, unless he is a man of genius; and you, Sir, are not a man of genius. From having known nothing originally, you think

it a great acquisition to know anything now, no matter what or how small it is—nay, the smaller and more insignificant it is, the more curious you seem to think it, as it is farther removed from common sense and human nature. The collating of points and commas is the highest game your literary ambition can reach to, and the squabbles of editors are to you infinitely more important than the meaning of an author. You think more of the letter than the spirit of a passage, and, in your eagerness to show your minute superiority over those who have gone before you, generally miss both. In comparing yourself with others, you make a considerable mistake. You suppose the common advantages of a liberal education to be something peculiar to yourself, and calculate your progress beyond the rest of the world from the obscure point at which you first set out. Yet your overweening self-complacency is never easy but in the expression of your contempt for others; like a conceited mechanic in a village ale-house, you would set down every one who differs from you as an ignorant blockhead, and very fairly infer that any one who is beneath yourself must be nothing. You have been well called an ultra-Crepidarian critic. From the difficulty you yourself have in constructing a sentence of common grammar, and your frequent failures, you instinctively presume that no author who comes under the lash of your pen can understand his mother-tongue: and again, you suspect every one who is not your “very good friend” of knowing nothing of the Greek or Latin, because you are surprised to think how you came by your own knowledge of them. There is an innate littleness and vulgarity in all you do. In combating an opinion, you never take a broad and liberal ground, state it fairly, allow what there is of truth or an appearance of truth, and then assert your own judgment by exposing what is deficient in it, and giving a more masterly view of the subject. No: this would be committing your powers and pretensions where you dare not trust them. You know yourself better. You deny the meaning altogether, misquote or misapply, and then plume yourself on your own superiority to the absurdity you have created. Your triumph over your antagonists is the triumph of your cunning and mean-spiritedness over some nonentity of your own making; and your wary self-knowledge shrinks from a comparison with any but the most puny pretensions, as the spider retreats from the caterpillar into its web.

There cannot be a greater nuisance than a dull, envious, pragmatical, low-bred man, who is placed as you are in the situation of the Editor of such a work as the *Quarterly Review*. Conscious that his reputation stands on very slender and narrow grounds, he is naturally jealous of that of others. He insults unsuccessful

authors: he hates successful ones. He is angry at the faults of a work; more angry at its excellences. If an opinion is old, he treats it with supercilious indifference; if it is new, it provokes his rage. Everything beyond his limited range of inquiry appears to him a paradox and an absurdity; and he resents every suggestion of the kind as an imposition on the public and an imputation on his own sagacity. He cavils at what he does not comprehend, and misrepresents what he knows to be true. Bound to go through the nauseous task of abusing all those who are not, like himself, the abject tools of power, his irritation increases with the number of obstacles he encounters and the number of sacrifices he is obliged to make of common sense and decency to his interest and self-conceit. Every instance of prevarication he wilfully commits makes him more in love with hypocrisy, and every indulgence of his hired malignity makes him more disposed to repeat the insult and the injury. His understanding becomes daily more distorted, and his feelings more and more callous. Grown old in the service of corruption, he drivels on to the last with prostituted impotence and shameless effrontery; salves a meagre reputation for wit, by venting the dribblets of his spleen and impertinence on others; answers their arguments by confuting himself; mistakes habitual obtuseness of intellect for a particular acuteness, not to be imposed upon by shallow appearances; unprincipled rancour for zealous loyalty; and the irritable, discontented, vindictive, peevish effusions of bodily pain and mental imbecility for proofs of refinement of taste and strength of understanding.

Such, Sir, is the picture of which you have sat for the outline:—all that remains is to fill up the little, mean, crooked, dirty details. The task is to me no very pleasant one; for I can feel very little ambition to follow you through your ordinary routine of pettifogging objections and barefaced assertions, the only difficulty of making which is to throw aside all regard to truth and decency, and the only difficulty in answering them is to overcome one's contempt for the writer. But you are a nuisance, and should be abated.

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### ON POETRY IN GENERAL.

THE best general notion which I can give of poetry is, that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice, or sounds, expressing it. . . .

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. He who has a contempt for poetry cannot have much respect for himself, or for anything else. It is not a mere frivolous accomplishment (as some persons have been led to imagine), the trifling amusement of a few idle readers or leisure hours: it has been the study and delight of mankind in all ages. Many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books, contained in lines of ten syllables with like endings; but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea, in the growth of a flower that "spreads its sweet leaves to the air, and dedicates its beauty to the sun," *there* is poetry, in its birth. If history is a grave study, poetry may be said to be a graver: its materials lie deeper, and are spread wider. History treats, for the most part, of the cumbrous and unwieldy masses of things, the empty cases in which the affairs of the world are packed, under the heads of intrigue or war, in different states, and from century to century; but there is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry. It is not a branch of authorship; it is "the stuff of which our life is made." The rest is "mere oblivion," a dead letter: for all that is worth remembering in life is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness are all poetry. Poetry is that fine particle within us that expands, rarefies, refines, raises our whole being:

without it "man's life is poor as beast's." Man is a poetical animal; and those of us who do not study the principles of poetry act upon them all our lives, like Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who had always spoken prose without knowing it. The child is a poet, in fact, when he first plays at hide-and-seek, or repeats the story of Jack the Giant-killer; the shepherd-boy is a poet when he first crowns his mistress with a garland of flowers; the countryman, when he stops to look at the rainbow; the city apprentice, when he gazes after the Lord Mayor's show; the miser, when he hugs his gold; the courtier, who builds his hopes upon a smile; the savage, who paints his idol with blood; the slave, who worships a tyrant; or the tyrant, who fancies himself a god; the vain, the ambitious, the proud, the choleric man, the hero and the coward, the beggar and the king, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, all live in a world of their own making; and the poet does no more than describe what all the others think and act. . . .

Poetry, then, is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature. We shape things according to our wishes and fancies, without poetry; but poetry is the most emphatical language that can be found for those creations of the mind "which ecstasy is very cunning in." Neither a mere description of natural objects nor a mere delineation of natural feelings, however distinct or forcible, constitutes the ultimate end and aim of poetry, without the heightenings of the imagination. The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that, while it shows us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it: the flame of the passions, communicated to the imagination, reveals to us, as with a flash of lightning, the inmost recesses of thought, and penetrates our whole being. Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms: feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings. Poetry puts a spirit of life and motion into the universe. It describes the flowing, not the fixed. It does not define the limits of sense, or analyse the distinctions of the understanding, but signifies the excess of the imagination beyond the actual or ordinary impression of any object or feeling. The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself, that is impatient of all limit, that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur, to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. Poetry, according to Lord Bacon, for this reason "has something

divine in it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity, by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things, as reason and history do." It is strictly the language of the imagination; and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power. This language is not the less true to nature because it is false in point of fact, but so much the more true and natural if it conveys the impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind. Let an object, for instance, be presented to the senses in a state of agitation or fear, and the imagination will distort or magnify the object, and convert it into the likeness of whatever is most proper to encourage the fear. . . .

One mode in which the dramatic exhibition of passion excites our sympathy without raising our disgust is, that in proportion as it sharpens the edge of calamity and disappointment it strengthens the desire of good. It enhances our consciousness of the blessing, by making us sensible of the magnitude of the loss. The storm of passion lays bare and shows us the rich depths of the human soul: the whole of our existence, the sum-total of our passions and pursuits, of that which we desire and that which we dread, is brought before us by contrast; the action and reaction are equal; the keenness of immediate suffering only gives us a more intense aspiration after and a more intimate participation with the antagonist world of good: makes us drink deeper of the cup of human life: tugs at the heart-strings: loosens the pressure about them, and calls the springs of thought and feeling into play with tenfold force. . . .

Poetry is in all its shapes the language of the imagination and the passions, of fancy and will. Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the outcry which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason; for the end and use of poetry, "both at the first and now, was and is to hold the mirror up to nature," seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by means of literal truth, or abstract reason. The painter of history might as well be required to represent the face of a person who has just trod upon a serpent with the still-life expression of a common portrait, as the poet to describe the most striking and vivid impressions which things can be supposed to make upon the mind in the language of common conversation. Let who will strip nature of the colours and the shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so; the impressions of

common sense and strong imagination, that is, of passion and indifference, cannot be the same, and they must have a separate language to do justice to either. Objects must strike differently upon the mind, independently of what they are in themselves, as long as we have a different interest in them, as we see them in a different point of view, nearer or at a greater distance (morally or physically speaking), from novelty, from old acquaintance, from our ignorance of them, from our fear of their consequences, from contrast, from unexpected likeness. We can no more take away the faculty of the imagination than we can see all objects without light or shade. Some things must dazzle us by their preternatural light; others must hold us in suspense, and tempt our curiosity to explore their obscurity. Those who would dispel these various illusions, to give us their drab-coloured creation in their stead, are not very wise. Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little grey worm: let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting; so poetry is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination and to clip the wings of poetry. The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful pretensions. . . .

Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm; wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong and repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, or gradually varied, according to the occasion, to the sounds that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation, there poetry begins. Where one idea gives a tone and colour to others, where one feeling melts others into it, there can be no reason why the same principle should not be extended to the sounds by which the voice utters these



emotions of the soul, and blends syllables and lines into each other. It is to supply the inherent defect of harmony in the customary mechanism of language, to make the sound an echo to the sense, when the sense becomes a sort of echo to itself—to mingle the tide of verse, “the golden cadences of poetry,” with the tide of feeling, flowing and murmuring as it flows—in short, to take the language of the imagination from off the ground, and enable it to spread its wings where it may indulge its own impulses :

“Sailing with supreme dominion  
Through the azure deep of air”—

without being stopped, or fretted, or diverted with the abruptnesses and petty obstacles, and discordant flats and sharps of prose, that poetry was invented. It is to common language what springs are to a carriage or wings to feet. . . .

I will mention three works which come as near to poetry as possible without absolutely being so; namely, the “*Pilgrim’s Progress*,” “*Robinson Crusoe*,” and the *Tales of Boccaccio*. Chaucer and Dryden have translated some of the last into English rhyme, but the essence and the power of poetry was there before. That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by being “married to immortal verse.” If it is of the essence of poetry to strike and fix the imagination, whether we will or no, to make the eye of childhood glisten with the starting tear, to be never thought of afterwards with indifference, John Bunyan and Daniel Defoe may be permitted to pass for poets in their way. The mixture of fancy and reality in the “*Pilgrim’s Progress*” was never equalled in any allegory. His pilgrims walk above the earth, and yet are on it. What zeal, what beauty, what truth of fiction! What deep feeling in the description of Christian’s swimming across the water at last, and in the picture of the Shining Ones within the gates, with wings at their backs and garlands on their heads, who are to wipe all tears from his eyes! The writer’s genius, though not “dipped in dews of Castalie,” was baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The prints in this book are no small part of it. If the confinement of Philoctetes in the island of Lemnos was a subject for the most beautiful of all the Greek tragedies, what shall we say to Robinson Crusoe in his? Take the speech of the Greek hero on leaving his cave, beautiful as it is, and compare it with the reflections of the English adventurer in his solitary place of confinement. The thoughts of home, and of all from which he is for ever cut off, swell and press against his bosom, as the heaving ocean rolls

its ceaseless tide against the rocky shore, and the very beatings of his heart become audible in the eternal silence that surrounds him. Thus he says:

"As I walked about, either in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods, the mountains, and deserts I was in; and how I was a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness, without redemption. In the midst of the greatest composesures of my mind, this would break out upon me like a storm, and make me wring my hands, and weep like a child. Sometimes it would take me in the middle of my work, and I would immediately sit down and sigh, and look upon the ground for an hour or two together, and this was still worse to me, for if I could burst into tears or vent myself in words, it would go off, and the grief having exhausted itself would abate."

. . . I shall conclude this general account with some remarks on four of the principal works of poetry in the world, at different periods of history—Homer, the Bible, Dante, and, let me add, Ossian. In Homer, the principle of action or life is predominant; in the Bible, the principle of faith and the idea of Providence; Dante is a personification of blind will; and in Ossian we see the decay of life and the lag-end of the world. Homer's poetry is the heroic: it is full of life and action; it is bright as the day, strong as a river. In the vigour of his intellect, he grapples with all the objects of nature, and enters into all the relations of social life. He saw many countries, and the manners of many men; and he has brought them all together in his poem. He describes his heroes going to battle with a prodigality of life, arising from an exuberance of animal spirits; we see them before us, their number and their order of battle, poured out upon the plain "all plumed like ostriches, like eagles newly bathed, wanton as goats, wild as young bulls, youthful as May, and gorgeous as the sun at midsummer," covered with glittering armour, with dust and blood; while the gods quaff their nectar in golden cups or mingle in the fray; and the old men assembled on the walls of Troy rise up with reverence as Helen passes by them. The multitude of things in Homer is wonderful; their splendour, their truth, their force and variety. His poetry is, like his religion, the poetry of number and form: he describes the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The poetry of the Bible is that of imagination and of faith: it is abstract and disembodied: it is not the poetry of form, but of power; not of multitude, but of immensity. It does not divide

into many, but aggrandises into one. Its ideas of nature are like its ideas of God. It is not the poetry of social life, but of solitude: each man seems alone in the world, with the original forms of nature, the rocks, the earth, and the sky. It is not the poetry of action or heroic enterprise, but of faith in a supreme Providence and resignation to the power that governs the universe. As the idea of God was removed farther from humanity and a scattered polytheism, it became more profound and intense, as it became more universal, for the Infinite is present to everything: "If we fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, it is there also; if we turn to the east or the west, we cannot escape from it." Man is thus aggrandised in the image of his Maker. The history of the patriarchs is of this kind; they are founders of a chosen race of people, the inheritors of the earth; they exist in the generations which are to come after them. Their poetry, like their religious creed, is vast, unformed, obscure, and infinite; a vision is upon it; an invisible hand is suspended over it. The spirit of the Christian religion consists in the glory hereafter to be revealed; but in the Hebrew dispensation Providence took an immediate share in the affairs of this life. Jacob's dream arose out of this intimate communion between heaven and earth: it was this that let down, in the sight of the youthful patriarch, a golden ladder from the sky to the earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it, and shed a light upon the lonely place, which can never pass away. The story of Ruth, again, is as if all the depth of natural affection in the human race was involved in her breast. There are descriptions in the Book of Job more prodigal of imagery, more intense in passion, than anything in Homer; as that of the state of his prosperity, and of the vision that came upon him by night. The metaphors in the Old Testament are more boldly figurative. Things were collected more into masses, and gave a greater momentum to the imagination.

Dante was the father of modern poetry, and he may therefore claim a place in this connection. His poem is the first great step from Gothic darkness and barbarism; and the struggle of thought in it to burst the thralldom in which the human mind had been so long held is felt in every page. He stood bewildered, not appalled on that dark shore which separates the ancient and the modern world, and saw the glories of antiquity dawning through the abyss of time, while revelation opened its passage to the other world. He was lost in wonder at what had been done before him, and he dared to emulate it. Dante seems to have been indebted to the Bible for the gloomy tone of his mind, as well as for the prophetic fury which exalts and kindles his poetry; but he is utterly unlike Homer. His

genius is not a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace. He is power, passion, self-will personified. In all that relates to the descriptive or fanciful part of poetry, he bears no comparison to many who had gone before, or who have come after him; but there is a gloomy abstraction in his conceptions, which lies like a dead weight upon the mind—a benumbing stupor, a breathless awe, from the intensity of the impression—a terrible obscurity, like that which oppresses us in dreams—an identity of interest, which moulds every object to its own purposes, and clothes all things with the passions and imaginations of the human soul—that make amends for all other deficiencies. The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves; they want grandeur, beauty, and order; but they become everything by the force of the character he impresses upon them. His mind lends its own power to the objects which it contemplates, instead of borrowing it from them. He takes advantage even of the nakedness and dreary vacuity of his subject. His imagination peoples the shades of death, and broods over the silent air. He is the severest of all writers, the most hard and impenetrable, the most opposite to the flowery and glittering; [the writer] who relies most on his own power, and the sense of it in others, and who leaves most room to the imagination of his readers. Dante's only endeavour is to interest; and he interests by exciting our sympathy with the emotion by which he is himself possessed. He does not place before us the objects by which that emotion has been created; but he seizes on the attention, by showing us the effect they produce on his feelings; and his poetry accordingly gives the same thrilling and overwhelming sensation which is caught by gazing on the face of a person who has seen some object of horror. The improbability of the events, the abruptness and monotony in the "*Inferno*" are excessive; but the interest never flags, from the continued earnestness of the author's mind. Dante's great power is in combining internal feelings with external objects. . . .

Another writer whom I shall mention last, and whom I cannot persuade myself to think a mere modern in the groundwork, is Ossian. He is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers. As Homer is the first vigour and lustihead, Ossian is the decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There is one impression which he conveys more entirely than all other poets; namely, the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country; he is even without God in the world. He converses only with the spirits of the departed; with the motionless and silent clouds. The cold moonlight sheds its faint lustre on his

head; the fox peeps out of the ruined tower; the thistle waves its beard to the wandering gale; and the strings of his harp seem, as the hand of age, as the tale of other times, passes over them, to sigh and rustle like the dry reeds in the winter's wind! The feeling of cheerless desolation, of the loss of the pith and sap of existence, of the annihilation of the substance, and the clinging to the shadow of all things, as in a mock-embrace, is here perfect. In this way, the lamentation of Selma for the loss of Salgar is the finest of all. If it were indeed possible to show that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him so often complain, "Roll on, ye dark brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian!"

### CHAUCER AND SPENSER.

CHAUCER (who has been very properly considered as the father of English poetry) preceded Spenser by two centuries. He is supposed to have been born in London, in the year 1328, during the reign of Edward III., and to have died in 1400, at the age of seventy-two. He received a learned education at one or at both of the Universities, and travelled early into Italy, where he became thoroughly imbued with the spirit and excellences of the great Italian poets and prose-writers, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, and is said to have had a personal interview with one of these, Petrarch. He was connected by marriage with the famous John of Gaunt, through whose interest he was introduced into several public employments. Chaucer was an active partisan, a religious reformer, and from the share he took in some disturbances on one occasion, he was obliged to fly the country. On his return he was imprisoned, and made his peace with Government, as it is said, by a discovery of his associates. Fortitude does not appear at any time to have been the distinguishing virtue of poets. There is, however, an obvious similarity between the practical turn of Chaucer's mind and restless impatience of his character and the tone of his writings. Yet it would be too much to attribute the one to the other as cause and effect; for Spenser, whose poetical temperament was as effeminate as Chaucer's was stern and masculine, was equally engaged in public affairs, and had mixed equally in the great world. So much does native disposition predominate over accidental circumstances, moulding them to its previous bent and purposes! For while Chaucer's intercourse with the busy world, and collision with the actual passions and conflicting

interest of others, seemed to brace the sinews of his understanding, and gave to his writings the air of a man who describes persons and things that he had known and been intimately concerned in, the same opportunities, operating on a differently constituted frame, only served to alienate Spenser's mind the more from the "close-pent-up" scenes of ordinary life, and to make him "rive their concealing continents," to give himself up to the unrestrained indulgence of "flowery tenderness."

It is not possible for any two writers to be more opposite in this respect. Spenser delighted in luxurious enjoyment; Chaucer, in severe activity of mind. As Spenser was the most romantic and visionary, Chaucer was the most practical of all the great poets, the most a man of business and the world. His poetry reads like history. Everything has a downright reality, at least in the relator's mind. A simile or a sentiment is as if it were given in upon evidence. . . .

He speaks of what he wishes to describe with the accuracy, the discrimination of one who relates what has happened to himself, or has had the best information from those who have been eye-witnesses of it. The strokes of his pencil always tell. He dwells only on the essential, on that which would be interesting to the persons really concerned: yet, as he never omits any material circumstance, he is prolix from the number of points on which he touches, without being diffuse on any one; and is sometimes tedious from the fidelity with which he adheres to his subject, as other writers are from the frequency of their digressions from it. The chain of his story is composed of a number of fine links, closely connected together, and riveted by a single blow. There is an instance of the minuteness which he introduces into his most serious descriptions in his account of Palamon when left alone in his cell:

"Swiche sorrow he maketh that the grete tour  
Resounded of his yelling and clamour:  
The pure fetters on his shinnes grete  
Were of his bitter salte teres wete."

The mention of this last circumstance looks like a part of the instructions he had to follow, which he had no discretionary power to leave out or introduce at pleasure. He is contented to find grace and beauty in truth. He exhibits for the most part the naked object, with little drapery thrown over it. His metaphors, which are few, are not for ornament but use, and as like as possible to the things themselves. He does not affect to show his power over the reader's mind, but the power which his subject has over his own.

The readers of Chaucer's poetry feel more nearly what the persons he describes must have felt than perhaps those of any other poet. His sentiments are not voluntary effusions of the poet's fancy, but [are] founded on the natural impulses and habitual prejudices of the characters he has to represent. There is an inveteracy of purpose, a sincerity of feeling, which never relaxes or grows vapid, in whatever they do or say. There is no artificial, pompous display, but a strict parsimony of the poet's materials, like the rude simplicity of the age in which he lived. His poetry resembles the root just springing from the ground, rather than the full-blown flower. His muse is no "babbling gossip of the air," fluent and redundant, but, like a stammerer or a dumb person, that has just found the use of speech, crowds many things together with eager haste, with anxious pauses, and fond repetitions to prevent mistake. His words point as an index to the objects, like the eye or finger. There were none of the commonplaces of poetic diction in our author's time, no reflected lights of fancy, no borrowed roseate tints; he was obliged to inspect things for himself, to look narrowly, and almost to handle the object, as in the obscurity of morning we partly see and partly grope our way; so that his descriptions have a sort of tangible character belonging to them, and produce the effect of sculpture on the mind. Chaucer had an equal eye for truth of nature and discrimination of character; and his interest in what he saw gave new distinctness and force to his power of observation. The picturesque and the dramatic are in him closely blended together, and hardly distinguishable; for he principally describes external appearances as indicating character, as symbols of internal sentiment. There is a meaning in what he sees; and it is this which catches his eye by sympathy. Thus the costume and dress of the Canterbury Pilgrims, of the Knight, the Squire, the Oxford Scholar, the Gap-toothed Wife of Bath, and the rest speak for themselves. . . .

Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery possess the same sort of characteristic excellence, or what might be termed *gusto*. They have a local truth and freshness, which gives the very feeling of the air, the coolness or moisture of the ground. Inanimate objects are thus made to have a fellow-feeling in the interest of the story, and render back the sentiment of the speaker's mind. One of the finest parts of Chaucer is of this mixed kind. It is the beginning of the "Flower and the Leaf," where he describes the delight of that young beauty, shrouded in her bower, and listening, in the morning of the year, to the singing of the nightingale; while her joy rises with the rising song, and gushes out afresh at every pause, and is borne along with the full tide of pleasure, and still increases, and repeats,

and prolongs itself, and knows no ebb. The coolness of the arbour, its retirement, the early time of the day, the sudden starting up of the birds in the neighbouring bushes, the eager delight with which they devour and rend the opening buds and flowers, are expressed with a truth and feeling which make the whole appear like the recollection of an actual scene. . . .

The interval between Chaucer and Spenser is long and dreary. There is nothing to fill up the chasm but the names of Occleve, "ancient Gower," Lydgate, Wyatt, Surrey, and Sackville. Spenser flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was sent with Sir John Davies into Ireland, of which he has left behind him some tender recollections in his description of the bog of Allan, and a record in an ably written paper, containing observations on the state of that country and the means of improving it, which remain in full force to the present day. Spenser died at an obscure inn in London, it is supposed in distressed circumstances. The treatment he received from Burleigh is well known. Spenser, as well as Chaucer, was engaged in active life; but the genius of his poetry was not active; it is inspired by the love of ease and the relaxation from all the cares and business of life. Of all the poets, he is the most poetical. Though much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding writers were less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem (as a number of distinct narratives) from Ariosto; but he has engrafted upon it an exuberance of fancy and an endless voluptuousness of sentiment which are not to be found in the Italian writer. Further, Spenser is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is an originality, richness, and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions which almost vies with the splendour of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in a company gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough. In Spenser, we wander in another world among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it, and fulfils the delightful promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment, and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. . . .

The language of Spenser is full and copious to overflowing: it is



less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer's, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. He was, probably, seduced into a certain license of expression by the difficulty of filling up the moulds of his complicated rhymed stanza from the limited resources of his native language. This stanza, with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from the Italians. It was peculiarly fitted to their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song. Not that I would, on that account, part with the stanza of Spenser. We are, perhaps, indebted to this very necessity of finding out new forms of expression, and to the occasional faults to which it led, for a poetical language rich and varied and magnificent beyond all former, and almost all later, example. His versification is at once the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, "in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out," that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation, dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakspeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea; but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be over recalled.

### SHAKSPEARE AND MILTON.

IN looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact than the supposition that in what we understand by the *fine arts* as painting and poetry, relative perfection is only the result of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once well done constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration,

is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feeling, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into account the difference in the nature of the things or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in Biblical criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astronomy, &c., *i.e.*, in things depending on mere inquiry and experiment or on absolute demonstration, have been led hastily to conclude that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors, and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle of limitation or decay; and, inquiring no further about the matter, we infer, in the intoxication of our pride and the height of our self-congratulation, that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face, that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and privilege of each, of science and of art: of the one, never to attain its utmost limit of perfection; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Dante, and Ariosto (Milton alone was of a later age, and not the worse for it): Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio: the Greek sculptors and tragedians: all lived near the beginning of their arts, perfected, and all but created them. These giant-sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth, but they tower above their fellows; and the long line of their successors, in different ages, does not interpose any object to obstruct their view or lessen their brightness. In strength and stature they are univalled;

in grace and beauty they have not been surpassed. In after-ages and more refined periods (as they are called) great men have arisen, one by one, as it were by throes and at intervals; though in general the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of an inferior order, as Tasso and Pope among poets; Guido and Vandyke among painters. But in the earlier stages of the arts, as soon as the first mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language was sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters and in constellations, never so to rise again!

The arts of painting and poetry are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense around us—with what we know, and see, and feel intimately. They flow from the sacred shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of nature. But the pulse of the passions assuredly beat as high, the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood, three thousand or three hundred years ago as they are at present: the face of nature and “the human face divine” shone as bright then as they have ever done. But it is *their* light, reflected by true genius on art, that marks out its path before it, and sheds a glory round the Muses’ feet, like that which

“Circled Una’s angel face,  
And made a sunshine in the shady place.”

The four greatest names in English poetry are almost the four first we come to: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competition with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation; while the two first (though “the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves that they are underlings”) either never emerged far above the horizon or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakspeare as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term); and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakspeare, as they would be; and Milton, as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all; but the principle or moving power to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer was habit or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty and the love of the marvellous; in

Shakspeare, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances; and in Milton, [combined] only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton, elevation; of Shakspeare, everything. It has been said by some critic, that Shakspeare was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit; that they had all his other qualities but that; that one writer had as much sense, another as much fancy, another as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true; nor is the inference from it well founded, even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware that, upon his own showing, the great distinction of Shakspeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not his differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

The striking peculiarity of Shakspeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds, so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He had "a mind reflecting ages past" and present: all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar. "All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave," are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew as those which they did not know, or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies "nodded to him, and did him courtesies;" and the night-hag bestrode the blast at the command of "his so potent

art." The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women; and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel, and act as he makes them. He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, "subject to the same skyey influences," the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, "his frequent haunts and ancient neighbourhood," are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole "coheres semblably together" in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say: you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decipher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the by-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet, paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. . . .

That which, perhaps, more than anything else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakspeare from all others is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it: so the dialogues in Shakspeare are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow,

without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination everything has a life, a place and being of its own! . . .

Shakspeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. "It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes; or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, "puts a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. . . .

Shakspeare's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words; they come winged at his bidding, and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom. They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building, and not the scaffolding to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and spell out the particular words and phrases than the syllables of which they are

composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles in case of failure, on a word as good. In Shakspeare, any other word but the true one is sure to be wrong. If anybody, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description—

"Light thickens, and the crow  
Makes wing to the rooky wood,"

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for them equally expressive of the feeling. . . .

Shakspeare discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an indifference to personal reputation: he had none of the bigotry of his age; and his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in every other, he formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a perpetual invocation to the Muses, a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts constantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew theocracy, and of a perfect commonwealth; and he seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his imagination; so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of his genius as he did to the exercise of virtue or the good of his country. The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet vied with each other in his breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome :

"Blind Thamyras, and blind Mæonides,  
And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old."

He had a high standard with which he was always comparing himself, nothing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition. He thought of nobler forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart in the solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from his mind whatever might distract its purposes, or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. "With darkness and with dangers compassed round," he had the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory, "piling up every stone of lustre from the brook," for the delight and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and, as it were, sanctified his genius to this service from his youth. "For after," he says, "I had from my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences as my age could suffer,

by sundry masters and teachers, it was found that whether aught was imposed upon me by them, or betaken to of my own choice, the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live; but much latelier, in the private academies of Italy, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, met with acceptance above what was looked for, I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die. The accomplishment of these intentions, which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine: like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His Seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand; but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies."

So that of Spenser:

"The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,  
And is with child of glorious great intent,  
Can never rest until it forth have brought  
The eternal brood of glory excellent."

Milton, therefore, did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to



leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost: he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his descriptions of beauty, loading sweets on sweets, till the sense aches at them, and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation, that "makes Ossa like a wart." In Milton, there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakspeare, scarcely any. . . .

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakspeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr. Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the "*Paradise Lost*" as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together (with the exception already mentioned). Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza-writers, as Dryden is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there anything like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical to those of musical rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image. They rise or fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require.

### MILTON'S CHARACTER OF "SATAN."

SATAN is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings who, for endeavouring to be equal with the highest, and to divide the empire of heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the universe; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair: for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His

strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower; or

‘ As when heaven's fire  
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines.”

He was still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and with whose fate he sympathises as he views them round, far as the eye can reach; though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast from heaven, hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels, and mankind are his easy prey:

“ All is not lost; th' unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield,  
And what else is not to be overcome,”

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil, but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never once flinches. His love of power and contempt for suffering are never once relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within him; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of “that intellectual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity, though accompanied with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity, to “being swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of uncreated night.” He expresses the sum and substance of all ambition in one line: “Fallen cherub, to be weak as miserable, doing or suffering!” After such a conflict as his and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this: he founds a new empire in hell, and from it conquers this

new world, whither he bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surrounding fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline; the strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus chained to his rock was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, "rising aloft incumbent on the dusky air," it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images: so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed; but dazzling in its faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there, poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his argument by the by-tricks of a hump and cloven foot, to bring into the fair field of controversy the good old catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault, from his faith in religion and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

### DRYDEN AND POPE.

THE question, whether Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose-writer; that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties, and of the most refined taste; and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If indeed by a great poet we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet; for the bent, the characteristic power of his mind, lay the clean contrary way; namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his "Critical Essays;" or in representing them in the most

contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his "Satires;" or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of "Fancy;" or in adorning the trivial incidents and familiar relations of life with the utmost elegance of expression and all the flattering illusions of friendship or self-love, as in his "Epistles." He was not, then, distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart: but he was a wit and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen relish for the elegances of art, or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of thought and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, a refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art; and the distinction between the two, as well as I can make it out, is this. The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature; to be identified with, and to foreknow, and to record the feelings of all men at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions, and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they affect the first principles of his and our common nature. Such was Homer, such was Shakspeare, whose works will last as long as nature, because they are a copy of the indestructible forms and everlasting impulses of nature, welling out from the bosom as from a perennial spring, or stamped upon the senses by the hand of their Maker. The power of the imagination in them is the representative power of all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art; he judged of beauty by fashion; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakspeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter into the heart of man in all possible circumstances: Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved or hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth,

through Chaos and old Night. Pope's Muse never wandered with safety but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden than on the garden of Eden; he could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own person better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven, a piece of cut-glass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. He would be more delighted with a patent lamp than with "the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow," that fills the skies with its soft, silent lustre, that trembles through the cottage-window, and cheers the watchful mariner on the lonely wave. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him was the greatest: the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind over the immutable laws of nature. He preferred the artificial to the natural in external objects, because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw than admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modifications of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade dress, make much or little of them, indulge them for a longer or a shorter time, as he pleased; and because, while they amused his fancy and exercised his ingenuity, they never once disturbed his vanity, his levity or indifference. His mind was the antithesis of strength and grandeur; its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry; he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion. . . .

His Muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favour of the great. In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries; its forked lightnings, pointed sarcasms; for "the gnarled oak" he gives us "the soft myrtle:" for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plots, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills: for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot or the fall of a china-jar: for the tug and war of the elements or the deadly strife of the passions we have

"Calm contemplation and poetic ease."

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment! It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where everything assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful deformed. The wrong end of the magnifier is, to be sure, held to everything; but still the exhibition is highly curious, and we know not whether to be most pleased or surprised. Such, at least, is the best account I am able to give of this extraordinary man, without doing injustice to him or others. It is time to refer to particular instances in his works. . . .

Dryden was a better prose-writer, and a bolder and more varied versifier than Pope. He was a more vigorous thinker, a more correct and logical declaimer, and had more of what may be called strength of mind than Pope; but he had not the same refinement and delicacy of feeling. Dryden's eloquence and spirit were possessed in a higher degree by others, and in nearly the same degree by Pope himself; but that by which Pope was distinguished was an essence which he alone possessed, and of incomparable value on that sole account. Dryden's "Epistles" are excellent, but inferior to Pope's, though they appear (particularly the admirable one to Congreve) to have been the model on which the latter formed his. His "Satires" are better than Pope's. His "Absalom and Achitophel" is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to anything of Pope's in the same way. The character of Achitophel is very fine, and breathes, if not a sincere love for virtue, a strong spirit of indignation against vice.

MacFlecknoe is the origin of the idea of the "Dunciad;" but it is less elaborately constructed, less feeble, and less heavy. The difference between Pope's satirical portraits and Dryden's appears to be this in a good measure, that Dryden seems to grapple with his antagonists, and to describe real persons; Pope seems to refine upon them in his own mind, and to make them out just what he pleases, till they are not real characters, but the mere drivelling effusions of his spleen and malice. Pope describes the thing, and then goes on describing his own description, till he loses himself in verbal repetitions. Dryden recurs to the object often, takes fresh sittings of nature, and gives us new strokes of character as well as of his pencil. The "Hind and Panther" is an allegory as well as a satire, and so far it tells less home; the battery is not so point-blank. But otherwise

it has more genius, vehemence, and strength of description than any other of Dryden's works, not excepting the "Absalom and Achitophel." It also contains the finest examples of varied and sounding versification. . . .

He has left the best character of Shakspeare that has ever been written:—"To begin, then, with Shakspeare: he was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient, poets had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything you more than see it—you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him. . . .

#### WITHER.

WITHER is a name now almost forgotten, and his works seldom read; but his poetry is not infrequently distinguished by a tender and pastoral turn of thought; and there is one passage of exquisite feeling, describing the consolations of poetry in the following terms:

"She doth tell me where to borrow  
Comfort in the midst of sorrow;  
Makes the desolatest place  
To her presence be a grace;  
And the blackest discontents  
Be her fairest ornaments.  
In my former days of bliss  
Her divine skill taught me this,  
That from everything I saw,  
I could some invention draw;  
And raise pleasure to her height,  
Through the meanest object's sight,  
By the murmur of a spring,  
Or the least bough's rusteling,  
By a daisy whose leaves spread,  
Shut when Titan goes to bed;  
Or a shady bush or tree,  
She could more infuse in me,  
Than all Nature's beauties can  
*In some other wiser man.*

By her help I also now  
 Make this churlish place allow  
 Some things that may sweeten gladness  
 In the very gall of sadness.  
 The dull lonesness, the black shade,  
 That these hanging vaults have made :  
 The strange music of the waves,  
 Beating on these hollow caves :  
 This black den which rocks emboss,  
 Overgrown with eldest moss :  
 The rude portals that give light  
 More to terror than delight :  
 This my chamber of neglect,  
 Wall'd about with disrespect  
 From all these and this dull air  
 A fit object for despair,  
 She hath taught me by her might  
 To draw comfort and delight.  
 Therefore, thou best earthly bliss,  
 I will cherish thee for this.  
 Poesie, thou sweet'st content  
 That e'er Heav'n to mortals lent :  
 Though they as a trifle leave thee,  
 Whose dull thoughts cannot conceive thee :  
 Though thou be to them a scorn,  
 That to nought but earth are born :  
 Let my life no longer be  
 Than I am in love with thee.  
 Though our wise ones call thee madness,  
 Let me never taste of sadness,  
 If I love not thy maddest fits,  
 Above all their greatest wits.  
 And though some too seeming holy,  
 Do account thy raptures folly,  
 Thou dost teach me to condemn  
 What makes knaves and fools of them.

## THOMSON AND COWPER.

ALL that is admirable in Thomson's poem, "The Seasons," is the emanation of a fine natural genius and sincere love of his subject, unforced, unstudied, that comes uncalled for and departs unbidden. But he takes no pains, uses no self-correction; or if he seems to labour, it is worse than labour lost. His genius "cannot be constrained by mastery." The feeling of nature, of the changes of the seasons, was in his mind; and he could not help conveying this feeling to the reader by the mere force of spontaneous expression; but if the expression did not come of itself, he left the whole busi-



ness to chance; or, willing to evade instead of encountering the difficulties of his subject, fills up the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials, pieces out a beautiful half-line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases, like the shower of roses in which he represents the Spring, his own lovely, fresh, and innocent Spring, as descending to the earth:—

“Come, gentle Spring! ethereal Mildness! come,  
And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,  
While music wakes around, veil’d in a shower  
Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.”

Who, from such a flimsy, round-about, unmeaning commencement as this, would expect the delightful, unexaggerated, home-felt descriptions of natural scenery which are scattered in such unconscious profusion through this and the following cantos? For instance, the very next passage is crowded with a set of striking images:

“And see where sultry Winter passes off  
Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts:  
His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,  
The shatter’d forest, and the ravag’d vale;  
While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch  
Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,  
The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.  
As yet the trembling year is unconfirmed,  
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,  
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets  
Deform the day delightless; so that scarce  
The bittern knows his time with bill ingulph’d  
To shake the sounding marsh, or from the shore  
The plovers when to scatter o’er the heath,  
And sing their wild notes to the list’ning waste.”

Thomson is the best of our descriptive poets; for he gives most of the poetry of natural description. Others have been quite equal to him, or have surpassed him, as Cowper, for instance, in the picturesque part of his art, in marking the peculiar features and curious details of objects; no one has yet come up to him in giving the sum-total of their effects, their varying influences on the mind. He does not go into the minutiae of a landscape, but describes the vivid impression which the whole makes upon his own imagination, and thus transfers the same unbroken, unimpaired impression to the imagination of his readers. The colours with which he paints seem yet wet and breathing, like those of the living statue in the “Winter’s Tale.”

Nature in his descriptions is seen growing around us, fresh and lusty as in itself. We feel the effect of the atmosphere, its humidity or clearness, its heat or cold, the glow of summer, the gloom of winter, the tender promise of the spring, the full overshadowing foliage, the declining pomp and deepening tints of autumn. He transports us to the scorching heat of vertical suns, or plunges us into the chilling horrors and desolation of the frozen zone. We hear the snow drifting against the broken casement without, and see the fire blazing on the hearth within. The first scattered drops of a vernal shower patter on the leaves above our heads, or the coming storm resounds through the leafless groves. In a word, he describes not to the eye alone, but to the other senses, and to the whole man. He puts his heart into his subject, writes as he feels, and humanises whatever he touches. He makes all his descriptions teem with life and vivifying soul. His faults were those of his style—of the author and the man; but the original genius of the poet, the pith and marrow of his imagination, the fine natural mould in which his feelings were bedded, were too much for him to counteract by neglect, or affectation, or false ornaments. It is for this reason that he is, perhaps, the most popular of all our poets, treating of a subject that all can understand, and in a way that is interesting to all alike, to the ignorant or the refined, because he gives back the impression which the things themselves make upon us in nature. "That," said a man of genius, seeing a little shabby, soiled copy of Thomson's "Seasons" lying on the window-seat of an obscure country alehouse, "That is true fame!" . . .

Cowper, whom I shall speak of in this connection, lived at a considerable distance of time after Thomson, and had some advantages over him, particularly in simplicity of style, in a certain precision and minuteness of graphical description, and in a more careful and leisurely choice of such topics only as his genius and peculiar habits of mind prompted him to treat of. The "Task" has fewer blemishes than the "Seasons;" but it has not the same capital excellence, the "unbought grace" of poetry, the power of moving and infusing the warmth of the author's mind into that of the reader. If Cowper had a mere polished taste, Thomson had beyond comparison a more fertile genius, more impulsive force, a more entire forgetfulness of himself in his subject. If in Thomson you are sometimes offended with the slovenliness of the author by profession, determined to get through his task at all events, in Cowper you are no less dissatisfied with the finicalness of the private gentleman, who does not care whether he completes his work or not, and in whatever he does is evidently more solicitous to please himself than the public.

There is an effeminacy about him which shrinks from and repels common and hearty sympathy. With all his boasted simplicity and love of the country, he seldom launches out into general descriptions of nature; he looks at her over his clipped hedges and from his well-swept garden-walks; or if he makes a bolder experiment now and then, it is with an air of precaution, as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward accident, to make good his retreat home. He shakes hands with nature with a pair of fashionable gloves on, and leads "his Vashti" forth to public view with a look of consciousness and attention to etiquette, as a fine gentleman hands a lady out to dance a minuet. He is delicate to fastidiousness, and glad to get back, after a romantic adventure with crazy Kate, a party of gipsies, or a little child on a common, to the drawing-room and the ladies again, to the sofa and the tea-kettle—no, I beg his pardon, not to the singing, well-scoured tea-kettle, but to the polished and loud-hissing urn. His walks and arbours are kept clear of worms and snails with as much an appearance of *petit-mâitreship* as of humanity. He has some of the sickly sensibility and pampered refinements of Pope; but then Pope prided himself in them; whereas Cowper affects to be all simplicity and plainness. He had neither Thomson's love of the unadorned beauties of nature nor Pope's exquisite sense of the elegances of art. He was, in fact, a nervous man, afraid of trusting himself to the seductions of the one, and ashamed of putting forward his pretensions to an intimacy with the other; but to be a coward is not the way to succeed either in poetry, in war, or in love! Still he is a genuine poet, and deserves all his reputation. His worst vices are amiable weaknesses, elegant trifling. Though there is a frequent dryness, timidity, and *jejuneness* in his manner, he has left a number of pictures of domestic comfort and social refinement, as well as of natural imagery and feeling, which can hardly be forgotten but with the language itself. Such, among others, are his memorable description of the post coming in, that of the preparations for tea on a winter's evening in the country, of the unexpected fall of snow, of the frosty morning (with the fine satirical transition to the Empress of Russia's palace of ice), and, most of all, the winter's walk at noon. Every one of these may be considered as distinct studies, or highly-finished cabinet pieces, arranged without order or coherence. . . .

## SWIFT.

SWIFT's reputation as a poet has been in a manner obscured by the greater splendour, by the natural force and inventive genius of his prose writings; but if he had never written either the "Tale of a Tub" or "Gulliver's Travels," his name merely as a poet would have come down to us, and have gone down to posterity with well-earned honours. His "Imitations of Horace," and still more his Verses on his own Death, place him in the first rank of agreeable moralists in verse. There is not only a dry humour, an exquisite tone of irony, in these productions of his pen, but there is a touching, unpretending pathos, mixed up with the most whimsical and eccentric strokes of pleasantry and satire. His "Description of the Morning in London," and of a "City Shower," which were first published in the *Tatler*, are among the most delightful of the contents of that very delightful work. Swift shone as one of the most sensible of the poets; he is also distinguished as one of the most nonsensical of them. No man has written so many lackadaisical, slipshod, tedious, trifling, foolish, fantastical verses as he, which are so little an imputation on the wisdom of the writer, and which, in fact, only show his readiness to oblige others and to forget himself. He has gone so far as to invent a new stanza of fourteen and sixteen syllable lines for Mary the cookmaid to vent her budget of nothings, and for Mrs. Harris to gossip with the deaf old housekeeper. Oh, when shall we have such another Rector of Laracor? The "Tale of a Tub" is one of the most masterly compositions in the language, whether for thought, wit, or style. It is so capital and undeniable a proof of the author's talents, that Dr. Johnson, who did not like Swift, would not allow that he wrote it. It is hard that the same performance should stand in the way of a man's promotion to a bishopric, as wanting gravity, and at the same time be denied to be his, as having too much wit. It is a pity the Doctor did not find out some graver author, for whom he felt a critical kindness, on whom to father this splendid but unacknowledged production. Dr. Johnson could not deny that "Gulliver's Travels" were his; he therefore disputed their merits, and said that, after the first idea of them was conceived, they were easy to execute; all the rest followed mechanically. I do not know how that may be; but the mechanism employed is something very different from any that the author of "Rasselas" was in the habit of bringing to bear on such occasions. There is nothing more futile, as well as invidious, than

this mode of criticising a work of original genius. Its greatest merit is supposed to be in the invention; and you say very wisely, that it is not *in the execution*. You might as well take away the merit of the invention of the telescope by saying that, after its uses were explained and understood, any ordinary eyesight could look through it. Whether the excellence of "Gulliver's Travels" is in the conception or the execution is of little consequence; the power is somewhere, and it is a power that has moved the world. The power is not that of big words and vaunting commonplaces. Swift left these to those who wanted them, and has done what his acuteness and intensity of mind alone could enable any one to conceive or to perform. His object was to strip empty pride and grandeur of the imposing air which external circumstances throw around them; and for this purpose he has cheated the imagination of the illusions which the prejudices of sense and of the world put upon it, by reducing everything to the abstract predicament of size. He enlarges or diminishes the scale, as he wishes to show the insignificance or the grossness of our overweening self-love. That he has done this with mathematical precision, with complete presence of mind, and perfect keeping, in a manner that comes equally home to the understanding of the man and of the child, does not take away from the merit of the work or the genius of the author. He has taken a new view of human nature, such as a being of a higher sphere might take of it; he has torn the scales from off his moral vision; he has tried an experiment upon human life, and sifted its pretensions from the alloy of circumstances; he has measured it with a rule, has weighed it in a balance, and found it, for the most part, wanting and worthless—in substance and in show. Nothing solid, nothing valuable is left in his system but virtue and wisdom. What a libel is this upon mankind! What a convincing proof of misanthropy! What presumption and what *malice prepense*, to show men what they are, and to teach them what they ought to be! What a mortifying stroke aimed at national glory is that unlucky incident of Gulliver's wading across the channel and carrying off the whole fleet of Blefuscu! After that, we have only to consider which of the contending parties was in the right. What a shock to personal vanity is given in the account of Gulliver's nurse, Glumdalclitch! Still, notwithstanding the disparagement to her personal charms, her good-nature remains the same amiable quality as before. I cannot see the harm, the misanthropy, the immoral and degrading tendency of this. The moral lesson is as fine as the intellectual exhibition is amusing. It is an attempt to tear off the mask of imposture from the world; and nothing but imposture has a right to

complain of it. It is, indeed, the way with our quacks in morality to preach up the dignity of human nature, to pamper pride and hypocrisy with the idle mockeries of the virtues they pretend to, and which they have not; but it was not Swift's way to cant morality or anything else; nor did his genius prompt him to write unmeaning panegyrics on mankind! . . .

## SWIFT—RABELAIS—VOLTAIRE.

SWIFT was not a Frenchman. In this respect he differed from Rabelais and Voltaire. They have been accounted the three greatest wits in modern times; but their wit was of a peculiar kind in each. They are little beholden to each other; there is some resemblance between Lord Peter in the "Tale of a Tub" and Rabelais' Friar John; but in general they are all three authors of a substantive character in themselves. Swift's wit (particularly in his chief prose works) was serious, saturnine, and practical; Rabelais' was fantastical and joyous; Voltaire's was light, sportive, and verbal. Swift's wit was the wit of sense; Rabelais', the wit of nonsense; Voltaire's, of indifference to both. The ludicrous in Swift arises out of his keen sense of impropriety, his soreness and impatience of the least absurdity. He separates with a severe and caustic air truth from falsehood, folly from wisdom, "shows vice her own image, scorn her own feature;" and it is the force, the precision, and the honest abruptness with which the separation is made that excites our surprise, our admiration, and laughter. He sets a mark of reprobation on that which offends good sense and good manners which cannot be mistaken, and which holds it up to our ridicule and contempt ever after. His occasional disposition to trifling (already noticed) was a relaxation from the excessive earnestness of his mind. *Indignatio facit versus*. His better genius was his spleen. It was the biting acrimony of his temper that sharpened his other faculties. The truth of his perceptions produced the pointed coruscations of his wit; his playful irony was the result of inward bitterness of thought; his imagination was the product of the literal, dry, incorrigible tenaciousness of his understanding. He endeavoured to escape from the persecution of realities into the regions of fancy, and invented his Liliputians and Brobdingnagians, Yahoos and Houynhyms, as a diversion to the more painful knowledge of the world around him: *they* only made him laugh, while men and women made him angry. His feverish impatience made him view the infirmities of that great baby, the world, with the same scrutinising glance and jealous

irritability that a parent regards the failings of its offspring; but, as Rousseau has well observed, parents have not on this account been supposed to have more affection for other people's children than their own. In other respects, and except from the sparkling effervescence of his gall, Swift's brain was as "dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." He hated absurdity: Rabelais loved it, exaggerated it with supreme satisfaction, luxuriated in its endless varieties, rioted in nonsense, "reigned there and revelled." He dwelt on the absurd and ridiculous for the pleasure they gave him, not for the pain. He lived upon laughter, and died laughing. He indulged his vein, and took his full swing of folly. He did not balk his fancy or his readers. His wit was to him "as riches fineless;" he saw no end of his wealth in that way, and set no limits to his extravagance: he was communicative, prodigal, boundless, and inexhaustible. His were the Saturnalia of wit, the riches and the royalty, the health and long life. He is intoxicated with gaiety, mad with folly. His animal spirits drown him in a flood of mirth: his blood courses up and down his veins like wine. His thirst of enjoyment is as great as his thirst of drink: his appetite for good things of all sorts is unsatisfied, and there is a never-ending supply. *Discourse is dry*; so they moisten their words in their cups, and relish their dry jests with plenty of Botargos and dried neats'-tongues. It is like Camacho's wedding in "*Don Quixote*," where Sancho ladled out whole pullets and fat geese from the soup-kettles at a pull. The flagons are set a-running, their tongues wag at the same time, and their mirth flows as a river. How Friar John roars and lays about him in the vineyard! How Panurge whines in the storm, and how dexterously he contrives to throw the sheep overboard! How much Pantagruel behaves like a wise king! How Gargantua mewls, and pules, and slabbers his nurse, and demeans himself most like a royal infant! what provinces he devours! what seas he drinks up! How he eats, drinks, and sleeps—sleeps, eats, and drinks! The style of Rabelais is no less prodigious than his matter. His words are of marrow—unctuous, dropping fatness. He was a mad wag, the king of good fellows, and prince of practical philosophers!

Rabelais was a Frenchman of the old school, Voltaire of the new. The wit of the one arose from an exuberance of enjoyment; of the other, from an excess of indifference, real or assumed. Voltaire had no enthusiasm for one thing or another: he made light of everything. In his hands all things turn to chaff and dross, as the pieces of silver money in the "*Arabian Nights*" were changed by the hands of the enchanter into little dry crumbling leaves! He is a Parisian. He never exaggerates, is never violent: he treats things with the most

provoking *sang-froid*, and expresses his contempt by the most indirect hints and in the fewest words, as if he hardly thought them worth even his contempt. He retains complete possession of himself and of his subject. He does not effect his purpose by the eagerness of his blows, but by the delicacy of his tact. The poisoned wound he inflicted was so fine as scarcely to be felt till it rankled and festered in its "mortal consequences." His callousness was an excellent foil for the antagonists he had mostly to deal with. He took knaves and fools on his shield well. He stole away its cloak from grave imposture. If he reduced other things below their true value, making them seem worthless and hollow, he did not degrade the pretensions of tyranny and superstition below their true value, by making them seem utterly worthless and hollow, as contemptible as they were odious. This was the service he rendered to truth and mankind! His "*Candide*" is a masterpiece of wit. It has been called "the dull product of a scoffer's pen." It is, indeed, "the product of a scoffer's pen;" but after reading the "*Excursion*," few people will think it *dull*. It is in the most perfect keeping, and without any appearance of effort. Every sentence tells, and the whole reads like one sentence. . . .

### GRAY.

GRAY's "*Elegy in a Country Churchyard*" is one of the most classical productions that ever was penned by a refined and thoughtful mind, moralising on human life. The ode on a "*Distant Prospect of Eton College*" is more mechanical and commonplace; but it touches on certain strings about the heart, that vibrate in unison with it to our latest breath. No one ever passes by Windsor's "stately heights," or sees the distant spires of Eton College below, without thinking of Gray. He deserves that we should think of him; for he thought of others, and turned a trembling, ever-watchful ear to "the still sad music of humanity." His Letters are inimitably fine. If his poems are sometimes finical and pedantic, his prose is quite free from affectation. He pours his thoughts out upon paper as they arise in his mind; and they arise in his mind without pretence or constraint, from the pure impulse of learned leisure and contemplative indolence. He is not here on stilts or in buckram, but smiles in his easy-chair, as he moralises through the loopholes of retreat, on the bustle and raree-show of the world, or on "those reverend bedlams, colleges and schools!" He had nothing to do but to read and to think, and to tell his friends what he read and thought. His life was a luxurious, thoughtful dream. "Be mine," he says in one of his Letters, "to read eternal



new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon." And in another, to show his contempt for action and the turmoils of ambition, he says to some one, "Don't you remember Lords — and —, who are now great statesmen, little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part, I do not feel a bit wiser, or bigger or older, than I did then." What an equivalent for not being wise or great, to be always young! What a happiness never to lose or gain anything in the game of human life, by being never anything more than a looker-on!

### GOLDSMITH.

THE principal name of the period we are now come to is that of Goldsmith, than which few names stand higher or fairer in the annals of modern literature. One should have his own pen to describe him as he ought to be described: amiable, various, and bland, with careless inimitable grace touching on every kind of excellence: with manners unstudied, but a gentle heart: performing miracles of skill from pure happiness of nature, and whose greatest fault was ignorance of his own worth. As a poet, he is the most flowing and elegant of our versifiers since Pope, with traits of artless nature which Pope had not, and with a peculiar felicity in his turns upon words, which he constantly repeated with delightful effect, such as:

—— "His lot, though small,  
He sees that little lot, the lot of all."

"And turn'd and look'd, and turn'd to look again."

As a novelist, his "Vicar of Wakefield" has charmed all Europe. What reader is there in the civilised world who is not the better for the story of the washes which the worthy Dr. Primrose demolished so deliberately with the poker—for the knowledge of the guinea which the Miss Primroses kept unchanged in their pockets—the adventure of the picture of the Vicar's family, which could not be got into the house—and that of the Flamborough family, all painted with oranges in their hands—or for the story of the case of shagreen spectacles and the cosmogony?

As a comic writer, his "Tony Lumpkin" draws forth new powers from Mr. Liston's face. That alone is praise enough for it. Poor Goldsmith! how happy he has made others! how unhappy he was in himself! He never had the pleasure of reading his own works! He had only the satisfaction of good-naturedly relieving the necessities of others, and the consolation of being harassed to death with his own! He is the most amusing and interesting person in one

of the most amusing and interesting books in the world, Boswell's "Life of Johnson." His peach-coloured coat shall always bloom in Boswell's writings, and his fame survive in his own! His genius was a mixture of originality and imitation: he could do nothing without some model before him, and he could copy nothing that he did not adorn with the graces of his own mind. Almost all the latter part of the "Vicar of Wakefield," and a great deal of the former, is taken from "Joseph Andrews;" but the circumstances I have mentioned above are not. The finest things he has left behind him in verse are his character of a country schoolmaster, and that prophetic description of Burke in the "Retaliation." His moral Essays in the "Citizen of the World" are as agreeable chit-chat as can be conveyed in the form of didactic discourses.

## BURNS.

BURNS the poet had a strong mind, and a strong body, the fellow to it. He had a real heart of flesh and blood beating in his bosom—you can almost hear it throb. Some one said, that if you had shaken hands with him, his hands would have burnt yours. The Gods indeed "made him poetical;" but Nature had a hand in him first. His heart was in the right place. He did not "create a soul under the ribs of death," by tinkling siren sounds, or by piling up centos of poetical diction; but for the artificial flowers of poetry, he plucked the mountain-daisy under his feet; and a field-mouse, hurrying from its ruined dwelling, could inspire him with the sentiments of terror and pity. He held the plough or the pen with the same firm, manly grasp; nor did he cut out poetry as we cut out watch-papers, with finical dexterity, nor from the same flimsy materials. Burns was not like Shakspeare in the range of his genius; but there is something of the same magnanimity, directness, and unaffected character about him. He was not a sickly sentimentalist, a namby-pamby poet, a mincing metre ballad-monger, any more than Shakspeare. He would as soon hear "a brazen candlestick tuned, or a dry wheel grate on the axletree." He was as much of a man, not a twentieth part as much of a poet, as Shakspeare. With but little of his imagination or inventive power, he had the same life of mind: within the narrow circle of personal feeling or domestic incidents, the pulse of his poetry flows as healthily and vigorously. He had an eye to see, a heart to feel:—no more. His pictures of good-fellowship, of social glee, of quaint humour, are equal to anything; they come up to nature, and they cannot go beyond it. The sly jest collected in his laughing eye at the sight of the grotesque and

ludicrous in manners; the large tear rolled down his manly cheek at the sight of another's distress. He has made us as well acquainted with himself as it is possible to be, has let out the honest impulses of his native disposition, the unequal conflict of the passions in his breast, with the same frankness and truth of description. His strength is not greater than his weakness; his virtues were greater than his vices. His virtues belonged to his genius: his vices to his situation, which did not correspond to his genius. . . .

One would think that nothing could surpass his songs in beauty of expression and in true pathos; and nothing does or can, but some of the old Scotch ballads themselves. There is in them a still more original cast of thought, a more romantic imagery—the thistle's glittering down, the gillflower on the old garden-wall, the horseman's silver bells, the hawk on its perch: a closer intimacy with nature, a firmer reliance on it, as the only stock of wealth which the mind has to resort to, a more infantine simplicity of manners, a greater strength of affection, hopes longer cherished and longer deferred, sighs that the heart dare hardly heave, and "thoughts that often lie too deep for tears." We seem to feel that those who wrote and sang them (the early minstrels) lived in the open air, wandering on from place to place with restless feet and thoughts, and lending an ever-open ear to the fearful accidents of war or love, floating on the breath of old tradition or common fame, and moving the strings of their harp with sounds that sank into a nation's heart. How fine an illustration of this is that passage in "*Don Quixote*" where the knight and Sancho, going in search of Dulcinea, inquire their way of the countryman who was driving his mules to plough before break of day, "singing the ancient ballad of *Roncesvalles*!"

## BYRON.

LORD BYRON shuts himself up too much in the impenetrable gloom of his own thoughts, and buries the natural light of things in "nook monastic." The "*Giaour*," the "*Corsair*," "*Childe Harold*," are all the same person, and they are apparently all himself. The everlasting repetition of one subject, the same dark ground of fiction, with the darker colours of the poet's mind spread over it, the unceasing accumulation of horrors on horror's head, steels the mind against the sense of pain, as inevitably as the unwearied Siren sounds and luxurious monotony of Mr. Moore's poetry make it inaccessible to pleasure. Lord Byron's poetry is as morbid as Mr. Moore's is careless and dissipated. He has more depth of passion, more force and im-

petuosity, but the passion is always of the same unaccountable character, at once violent and sullen, fierce and gloomy. It is not the passion of a mind struggling with misfortune or the hopelessness of its desires, but of a mind preying upon itself, and disgusted with, or indifferent to, all other things. There is nothing less poetical than this sort of unaccommodating selfishness. There is nothing more repulsive than this sort of ideal absorption of all the interests of others, of the good and ills of life, in the ruling passion and moody abstraction of a single mind, as if it would make itself the centre of the universe, and there was nothing worth cherishing but its intellectual diseases. It is like a cancer eating into the heart of poetry. But still there is power; and power rivets attention and forces admiration. "He hath a demon;" and that is the next thing to being full of the God. His brow collects the scattered gloom; his eye flashes livid fire that withers and consumes. But still we watch the progress of the scathing bolt with interest, and mark the ruin it leaves behind with awe. Within the contracted range of his imagination, he has great unity and truth of keeping. He chooses elements and agents congenial to his mind: the dark and glittering ocean, the frail bark hurrying before the storm, pirates, and men that "house on the wild sea with wild usages." He gives the tumultuous eagerness of action and the fixed despair of thought. In vigour of style and force of conception he in one sense surpasses every writer of the present day. His indignant apothegms are like oracles of misanthropy. He who wishes for "a curse to kill with" may find it in Lord Byron's writings. Yet he has beauty lurking underneath his strength, tenderness sometimes joined with the frenzy of despair. A flash of golden light sometimes follows from a stroke of his pencil, like a falling meteor. The flowers that adorn his poetry bloom over charnel-houses and the grave! . . .

## SCOTT.

WALTER SCOTT is the most popular of all the poets of the present day, and deservedly so. He describes that which is most easily and generally understood with more vivacity and effect than anybody else. He has no excellences, either of a lofty or recondite kind, which lie beyond the reach of the most ordinary capacity to find out; but he has all the good qualities which all the world agree to understand. His style is clear, flowing, and transparent: his sentiments, of which his style is an easy and natural medium, are common to him with his readers. He has none of Mr. Wordsworth's

*idiosyncrasy*. He differs from his readers only in a greater range of knowledge and facility of expression. His poetry belongs to the class of *improvisatore* poetry. It has neither depth, height, nor breadth in it; neither uncommon strength nor uncommon refinement of thought, sentiment, or language. It has no originality. But if this author has no research, no moving power in his own breast, he relies with the greater safety and success on the force of his subject. He selects a story such as is sure to please, full of incidents, characters, peculiar manners, costume, and scenery; and he tells it in a way that can offend no one. He never wearies or disappoints you. He is communicative and garrulous; but he is not his own hero. He never obtrudes himself on your notice to prevent your seeing the subject. What passes in the poem, passes much as it would have done in reality. The author has little or nothing to do with it. Mr. Scott has great intuitive power of fancy, great vividness of pencil in placing external objects and events before the eye. The force of his mind is picturesque rather than *moral*. He gives more of the features of nature than the soul of passion. He conveys the distinct outlines and visible changes in outward objects, rather than "their mortal consequences." He is very inferior to Lord Byron in intense passion, to Moore in delightful fancy, to Mr. Wordsworth in profound sentiment; but he has more picturesque power than any of them; that is, he places the objects themselves, about which *they* might feel and think, in a much more striking point of view, with greater variety of dress and attitude, and with more local truth of colouring. His imagery is Gothic and grotesque. The manners and actions have the interest and curiosity belonging to a wild country and a distant period of time. Few descriptions have a more complete reality, a more striking appearance of life and motion, than that of the warriors in the "Lady of the Lake," who start up at the command of Rhoderic Dhu from their concealment under the fern, and disappear again in an instant. The "Lay of the Last Minstrel" and "Marmion" are the first, and perhaps the best, of his works. . . .

#### WORDSWORTH.

MR. WORDSWORTH is the most original poet now living. He is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses. His poetry is not external, but internal; it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song; he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. He is the poet of mere senti-

ment. Of many of the "Lyrical Ballads" it is not possible to speak in terms of too high praise, such as "Hart-leap Well," the "Banks of the Wye," "Poor Susan," parts of the "Leech-gatherer," the "Lines to a Cuckoo," "to a Daisy," the "Complaint," several of the Sonnets, and a hundred others of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos. They open a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet in modern times has done, or attempted. He has produced a deeper impression, and on a smaller circle, than any other of his contemporaries. His powers have been mistaken by the age, nor does he exactly understand them himself. He cannot form a whole. He has not the constructive faculty. He can give only the fine tones of thought, drawn from his mind by accident or nature, like the sounds drawn from the Æolian harp by the wandering gale. He is totally deficient in all the machinery of poetry. His "Excursion," taken as a whole, notwithstanding the noble materials thrown away in it, is a proof of this. The line labours, the sentiment moves slow; but the poem stands stock-still. The reader makes no way from the first line to the last. It is more than anything in the world like Robinson Crusoe's boat, which would have been an excellent good boat, and would have carried him to the other side of the globe, but that he could not get it out of the sand where it stuck fast. I did what little I could to help to launch it at the time, but it would not do. I am not, however, one of those who laugh at the attempts or failures of men of genius. It is not my way to cry, "Long life to the conqueror!" Success and desert are not with me synonymous terms; and the less Mr. Wordsworth's general merits have been understood, the more necessary is it to insist upon them. This is not the place to repeat what I have already said on the subject. The reader may turn to it in the "Round Table." I do not think, however, there is anything in the larger poem equal to many of the detached pieces in the "Lyrical Ballads." As Mr. Wordsworth's poems have been little known to the public, or chiefly through garbled extracts from them, I will here give an entire poem, "Hart-Leap Well" (one that has always been a favourite with me), that the reader may know what it is that the admirers of this author find to be delighted with in his poetry. Those who do not feel the beauty and the force of it may save themselves the trouble of inquiring further.

[*Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, 1819. Four Editions of this work have been published.]

I SHALL conclude this imperfect and desultory sketch of wit and humour with Barrow's celebrated description of the same subject. He says:—"But first it may be demanded, what the thing we speak of is, or what this facetiousness doth import; to which question I might reply, as Democritus did to him that asked the definition of a man—'*tis that which we all see and know*'; and one better apprehends what it is by acquaintance, than I can inform him by description. It is, indeed, a thing so versatile and multiform, appearing in so many shapes, so many postures, so many garbs, so variously apprehended by several eyes and judgments, that it seemeth no less hard to settle a clear and certain notice thereof, than to make a portrait of Proteus, or to define the figure of fleeting air. Sometimes it lieth in pat allusion to a known story, or in seasonable application of a trivial saying, or in forging an apposite tale: sometimes it playeth in words and phrases, taking advantage from the ambiguity of their sense, or the affinity of their sound: sometimes it is wrapped in a dress of luminous expression: sometimes it lurketh under an odd similitude. Sometimes it is lodged in a sly question, in a smart answer; in a quirkish reason; in a shrewd intimation; in cunningly diverting or cleverly restoring an objection: sometimes it is couched in a bold scheme of speech; in a tart irony; in a lusty hyperbole; in a startling metaphor; in a plausible reconciling of contradictions, or in acute nonsense: sometimes a scenical representation of persons or things, a counterfeit speech, a mimical look or gesture passeth for it; sometimes an affected simplicity, sometimes a presumptuous bluntness giveth it being; sometimes it riseth only from a lucky hitting upon what is strange: sometimes from a crafty wresting obvious matter to the purpose: often it consisteth in one knows not what, and springeth up one can hardly tell how. Its ways are unaccountable and inexplicable, being answerable to the numberless roving of fancy and windings of language. It is, in short, a manner of speaking out of the simple and plain way (such as reason teacheth and knoweth things by), which by a pretty surprising uncouthness in conceit or expression doth affect and amuse the fancy, showing in it some wonder, and breathing some delight thereto. It raiseth admiration, as signifying a nimble sagacity of apprehension, a special felicity of invention, a vivacity of spirit, and reach of wit more than vulgar: it seeming to argue a rare quickness of parts, that one can fetch in remote conceits applicable; a notable skill

that he can dexterously accommodate them to a purpose before him, together with a lively briskness of humour, not apt to damp those sportful flashes of imagination. (Whence in Aristotle such persons are termed *επιδείοι*, dexterous men and *ευτροποί*, men of facile or versatile manners, who can easily turn themselves to all things, or turn all things to themselves.) It also procureth delight by gratifying curiosity with its rareness or semblance of difficulty (as monsters, not for their beauty but their rarity; as juggling tricks, not for their use but their abstruseness, are beheld with pleasure); by diverting the mind from its road of serious thoughts; by instilling gaiety and airiness of spirit; by provoking to such dispositions of spirit, in way of emulation or complaisance, and by seasoning matter, otherwise distasteful or insipid, with an unusual and thence grateful tang." . . .

## ENGLISH COMEDY.

COMEDY is a "graceful ornament to the civil order; the Corinthian capital of polished society." Like the mirrors which have been added to the sides of one of our theatres, it reflects the images of grace, of gaiety, and pleasure double, and completes the perspective of human life. To read a good comedy is to keep the best company in the world, where the best things are said and the most amusing happen. The wittiest remarks are always ready on the tongue, and the luckiest occasions are always at hand to give birth to the happiest conceptions. Sense makes strange havoc of nonsense. Refinement acts as a foil to affectation, and affectation to ignorance. Sentence after sentence tells. We don't know which to admire most, the observation or the answer to it. We would give our fingers to be able to talk so ourselves, or to hear others talk so. In turning over the pages of the best comedies, we are almost transported to another world, and escape from this dull age to one that was all life, and whim, and mirth, and humour. The curtain rises, and a gayer scene presents itself, as on the canvas of Watteau. We are admitted behind the scenes like spectators at court, on a levee or birthday; but it is the court, the gala-day of wit and pleasure, of gallantry and Charles II.! What an air breathes from the name! what a rustling of silks and waving of plumes! what a sparkling of diamond earrings and shoe-buckles! What bright eyes! (Ah, those were Waller's Sacharissa's as she passed!) what killing looks and graceful motions! How the faces of the whole ring are dressed in smiles! how the repartee goes round! how wit and folly, elegance and awkward imitation of it, set one another off! Happy, thought-



less age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no further than the choice of a sword-knot or the adjustment of a side-curl; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing eloquence of dress; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies, in giddy mazes, through the walks of St. James's Park!

The four principal writers of this style of comedy (which I think the best) are undoubtedly Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar. The dawn was in Etherege, as its latest close was in Sheridan. It is hard to say which of these four is best, or in what each of them excels, they had so many and such great excellences.

Congreve is the most distinct from the others, and the most easily defined, both from what he possessed and from what he wanted. He had by far the most wit and elegance, with less of other things, of humour, character, incident, &c. His style is inimitable, nay, perfect. It is the highest model of comic dialogue. Every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the most polished and pointed terms. Every page presents a shower of brilliant conceits, is a tissue of epigrams in prose, is a new triumph of wit, a new conquest over dulness. The fire of artful raillery is nowhere else so well kept up. This style, which he was almost the first to introduce, and which he carried to the utmost pitch of classical refinement, reminds one exactly of Collins's description of wit as opposed to humour:

“ Whose jewels in his crisped hair  
Are placed each other's light to share.”

Sheridan will not bear a comparison with him in the regular antithetical construction of his sentences, and in the mechanical artifices of his style, though so much later, and though style in general has been so much studied, and in the mechanical part so much improved since then. It bears every mark of being what he himself in the dedication of one of his plays tells us that it was, a spirited copy taken off and carefully revised from the most select society of his time, exhibiting all the sprightliness, ease, and animation of familiar conversation, with the correctness and delicacy of the most finished composition. His works are a singular treat to those who have cultivated a taste for the niceties of English style: there is a peculiar flavour in the very words, which is to be found in hardly any other writer. To the mere reader his writings would be an irreparable loss: to the stage they are already become a dead letter, with the exception of one of them, “*Love for Love*.” This play is as full of

character, incident, and stage-effect as almost any of those of his contemporaries, and fuller of wit than any of his own, except perhaps the "Way of the World." It still acts, and is still acted well. The effect of it is prodigious on the well-informed spectator. . . .

Wycherley was before Congreve; and his "Country Wife" will last longer than anything of Congreve's as a popular acting play. It is only a pity that it is not entirely his own, but it is enough so to do him never-ceasing honour, for the best things are his own. His humour is, in general, broader, his characters more natural, and his incidents more striking than Congreve's. It may be said of Congreve, that the workmanship overlays the materials: in Wycherley, the casting of the parts and the fable are alone sufficient to ensure success. We forget Congreve's characters, and only remember what they say: we remember Wycherley's characters, and the incidents they meet with, just as if they were real, and forget what they say, comparatively speaking. Miss Peggy (or Mrs. Margery Pinchwife) is a character that will last for ever, I should hope; and even when the original is no more, if that should ever be, while self-will, curiosity, art, and ignorance are to be found in the same person, it will be just as good and as intelligible as ever in the description, because it is built on first principles, and brought out in the fullest and broadest manner. . . .

## THE PERIODICAL ESSAYISTS.

"The proper study of mankind is man."

I now come to speak of that sort of writing which has been so successfully cultivated in this country by our periodical Essayists, and which consists in applying the talents and resources of the mind to all that mixed mass of human affairs which, though not included under the head of any regular art, science, or profession, falls under the cognisance of the writer, and "comes home to the business and bosoms of men."

*Quicquid agunt homines nostri farrago libelli,*

is the general motto of this department of literature. It does not treat of minerals or fossils, of the virtues of plants or the influence of planets; it does not meddle with forms of belief or systems of

philosophy, nor launch into the world of spiritual existences; but it makes familiar with the world of men and women, records their actions, assigns their motives, exhibits their whims, characterises their pursuits in all their singular and endless variety, ridicules their absurdities, exposes their inconsistencies, "holds the mirror up to nature, and shows the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure;" takes minutes of our dress, air, looks, words, thoughts, and actions; shows us what we are, and what we are not; plays the whole game of human life over before us, and by making us enlightened spectators of its many-coloured scenes, enables us (if possible) to become tolerably reasonable agents in the one in which we have to perform a part. "The act and practice part of life is thus made the mistress of our theorique." It is the best and most natural course of study. It is in morals and manners what the experimental is in natural philosophy, as opposed to the dogmatical method. It does not deal in sweeping clauses of proscription and anathema, but in nice distinctions and liberal constructions. It makes up its general accounts from details, its few theories from many facts. It does not try to prove all black or all white as it wishes, but lays on the intermediate colours (and most of them not unpleasing ones), as it finds them blended with "the web of our life, which is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together." It inquires what human life is and has been, to show what it ought to be. It follows it into courts and camps, into town and country, into rustic sports or learned disputations, into the various shades of prejudice or ignorance, of refinement or barbarism, into its private haunts or public pageants, into its weaknesses and littlenesses, its professions and its practices: before it pretends to distinguish right from wrong, or one thing from another. How, indeed, should it do so otherwise?

" Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,  
Plenius et melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit."

The writers I speak of are, if not moral philosophers, moral historians, and that's better: or if they are both, they found the one character upon the other; their premises precede their conclusions; and we put faith in their testimony, for we know that it is true.

### MONTAIGNE.

MONTAIGNE was the first person who in his "Essays" led the way to this kind of writing among the moderns. The great merit of Montaigne, then, was that he may be said to have been the first

who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man. And as courage is generally the effect of conscious strength, he was probably led to do so by the richness, truth, and force of his own observations on books and men. He was, in the truest sense, a man of original mind; that is, he had the power of looking at things for himself, or as they really were, instead of blindly trusting to and fondly repeating what others told him that they were. He got rid of the go-cart of prejudice and affectation, with the learned lumber that follows at their heels, because he could do without them. In taking up his pen he did not set up for a philosopher, wit, orator, or moralist, but he became all these by merely daring to tell us whatever passed through his mind, in its naked simplicity and force, that he thought anyways worth communicating. He did not, in the abstract character of an author, undertake to say all that could be said upon a subject, but what in his capacity as an inquirer after truth he happened to know about it. He was neither a pedant nor a bigot. He neither supposed that he was bound to know all things, nor that all things were bound to conform to what he had fancied or would have them to be. In treating of men and manners, he spoke of them as he found them, not according to preconceived notions and abstract dogmas; and he began by teaching us what he himself was. In criticising books he did not compare them with rules and systems, but told us what he saw to like or dislike in them. He did not take his standard of excellence "according to an exact scale" of Aristotle, or fall out with a work that was good for anything because "not one of the angles at the four corners was a right one." He was, in a word, the first author who was not a bookmaker, and who wrote not to make converts of others to established creeds and prejudices, but to satisfy his own mind of the truth of things. In this respect we know not which to be most charmed with, the author or the man. There is an inexpressible frankness and sincerity, as well as power, in what he writes. There is no attempt at imposition or concealment, no juggling tricks or solemn mouthing, no laboured attempts at proving himself always in the right, and everybody else in the wrong; he says what is uppermost, lays open what floats at the top or the bottom of his mind, and deserves Pope's character of him, where he professes to

—"pour out all as plain  
As downright Shippen, or as old Montaigne."

He does not converse with us like a pedagogue with his pupil, whom he wishes to make as great a blockhead as himself, but like a philosopher and friend who has passed through life with thought and

observation, and is willing to enable others to pass through it with pleasure and profit. A writer of this stamp, I confess, appears to me as much superior to a common bookworm as a library of real books is superior to a mere bookcase, painted and lettered on the outside with the names of celebrated works. As he was the first to attempt this new way of writing, so the same strong natural impulse which prompted the undertaking carried him to the end of his career. The same force and honesty of mind which urged him to throw off the shackles of custom and prejudice would enable him to complete his triumph over them. He has left little for his successors to achieve in the way of just and original speculation on human life. Nearly all the thinking of the two last centuries of that kind which the French denominate *morale observatrice* is to be found in Montaigne's "Essays:" there is the germ, at least, and generally much more. He sowed the seed and cleared away the rubbish, even where others have reaped the fruit or cultivated and decorated the soil to a greater degree of nicety and perfection. There is no one to whom the old Latin adage is more applicable than to Montaigne, "*Percant isti qui ante nos nostra dixerunt.*" There has been no new impulse given to thought since his time. Among the specimens of criticisms on authors which he has left us are those on Virgil, Ovid, and Boccaccio, in the account of books which he thinks worth reading, or (which is the same thing) which he finds he can read in his old age, and which may be reckoned among the few criticisms which are worth reading at any age. . . .

#### STEELE AND ADDISON.

I HAVE always preferred the "Tatler" to the "Spectator." Whether it is owing to my having been earlier or better acquainted with the one than the other, my pleasure in reading these two admirable works is not in proportion to their comparative reputation. The "Tatler" contains only half the number of volumes, and, I will venture to say, nearly an equal quantity of sterling wit and sense. "The first sprightly runnings" are there: it has more of the original spirit, more of the freshness and stamp of nature. The indications of character and strokes of humour are more true and frequent; the reflections that suggest themselves arise more from the occasion, and are less spun out into regular dissertations. They are more like the remarks which occur in sensible conversation, and less like a lecture. Something is left to the understanding of the reader. Steele seems to have gone into his closet chiefly to set

down what he observed out of doors. Addison seems to have spent most of his time in his study, and to have spun out and wiredrawn the hints which he borrowed from Steele, or took from nature, to the utmost. I am far from wishing to depreciate Addison's talents, but I am anxious to do justice to Steele, who was, I think, upon the whole a less artificial and more original writer. The humorous descriptions of Steele resemble loose sketches, or fragments of a comedy; those of Addison are rather comments or ingenious paraphrases on the genuine text. The characters of the club, not only in the "Tatler," but in the "Spectator," were drawn by Steele. That of Sir Roger de Coverley is among the number. Addison has, however, gained himself immortal honour by his manner of filling up this last character. Who is there that can forget, or be insensible to, the inimitable nameless graces and varied traits of nature and of old English character in it: to his unpretending virtues and amiable weaknesses: to his modesty, generosity, hospitality, and eccentric whims: to the respect of his neighbours, and the affection of his domestics: to his wayward, hopeless, secret passion for his fair enemy, the widow, in which there is more of real romance and true delicacy than in a thousand tales of knight-errantry (we perceive the hectic flush of his cheek, the faltering of his tongue in speaking of her bewitching airs and "the whiteness of her hand"): to the havoc he makes among the game in his neighbourhood: to his speech from the bench, to show the Spectator what is thought of him in the country: to his unwillingness to be put up as a sign-post, and his having his own likeness turned into the Saracen's head: to his gentle reproof of the baggage of a gipsy that tells him "he has a widow in his line of life:" to his doubts as to the existence of witchcraft, and protection of reputed witches: to his account of the family pictures, and his choice of a chaplain: to his falling asleep at church, and his reproof of John Williams, as soon as he recovered from his nap, for talking in sermon-time? The characters of Will Wimble and Will Honeycomb are not a whit behind their friend, Sir Roger, in delicacy and felicity. The delightful simplicity and good-humoured officiousness in the one are set off by the graceful affectation and courtly pretension in the other. How long since I first became acquainted with these two characters in the "Spectator!" What old-fashioned friends they seem, and yet I am not tired of them like so many other friends, nor they of me! How airy these abstractions of the poet's pen stream over the dawn of our acquaintance with human life! how they glance their fairest colours on the prospect before us! how pure they remain in it to the last, like the rainbow in the evening-cloud, which the rude hand

of time and experience can neither soil nor dissipate! What a pity that we cannot find the reality! And yet if we did, the dream would be over. . . .

### JOHNSON.

THE most triumphant record of the talents and character of Johnson is to be found in Boswell's Life of him. The man was superior to the author. When he threw aside his pen, which he regarded as an encumbrance, he became not only learned and thoughtful, but acute, witty, humorous, natural, honest; hearty and determined, "the king of good fellows and wale of old men." There are as many smart repartees, profound remarks, and keen invectives to be found in Boswell's "inventory of all he said" as are recorded of any celebrated man. The life and dramatic play of his conversation forms a contrast to his written works. His natural powers and undisguised opinions were called out in convivial intercourse. In public, he practised with the foils on; in private, he unsheathed the sword of controversy, and it was "the Ebro's temper." The eagerness of opposition roused him from his natural sluggishness and acquired timidity; he returned blow for blow; and whether the trial were of argument or wit, none of his rivals could boast much of the encounter. Burke seems to have been the only person who had a chance with him; and it is the unpardonable sin of Boswell's work, that he has purposely omitted their combats of strength and skill. Goldsmith asked, "Does he wind into a subject like a serpent, as Burke does?" And when exhausted with sickness, he himself said, "If that fellow Burke were here now, he would kill me." It is to be observed that Johnson's colloquial style was as blunt, direct, and downright as his style of studied composition was involved and circuitous. As when Topham Beauclerc and Langton knocked him up at his chambers, at three in the morning, and he came to the door with the poker in his hand, but seeing them, exclaimed, 'What, is it you, my lads? then I'll have a frisk with you!' And he afterwards reproaches Langton, who was a literary milksop, for leaving them to go to an engagement "with some *un-ideal* girls." What words to come from the mouth of the great moralist and lexicographer! His good deeds were as many as his good sayings. His domestic habits, his tenderness to servants, and readiness to oblige his friends; the quantity of strong tea that he drank to keep down sad thoughts; his many labours reluctantly begun and irresolutely laid aside; his honest acknowledgment of his own, and indulgence to the weaknesses of others; his throwing himself back

in the post-chaise with Boswell, and saying, "Now I think I am a good-humoured fellow," though nobody thought him so, and yet he was; his quitting the society of Garrick and his actresses, and his reason for it; his dining with Wilkes, and his kindness to Goldsmith; his sitting with the young ladies on his knee at the Mitre, to give them good advice, in which situation, if not explained, he might be taken for Falstaff; and last and noblest, his carrying the unfortunate victim of disease and dissipation on his back up through Fleet Street (an act which realises the parable of the good Samaritan)—all these, and innumerable others, endear him to the reader, and must be remembered to his lasting honour. He had faults, but they lie buried with him. He had his prejudices and his intolerant feelings; but he suffered enough in the conflict of his own mind with them. For if no man can be happy in the free exercise of his reason, no wise man can be happy without it. His were not time-serving, heartless, hypocritical prejudices, but deep, inwoven, not to be rooted out but with life and hope, which he found from old habit necessary to his own peace of mind, and thought so to the peace of mankind. I do not hate, but love him for them. They were between himself and his conscience; and should be left to that higher tribunal, "where they in trembling hope repose, the bosom of his Father and his God." In a word, he has left behind him few wiser or better men.

## THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS.

[The greater portion of this paper originally appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1815.]

THERE is an exclamation in one of Gray's Letters—"Be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon!" If I did not utter a similar aspiration at the conclusion of the last new novel which I read (I would not give offence by being more particular as to the name), it was not from any want of affection for the class of writing to which it belongs; for, without going so far as the celebrated French philosopher, who thought that more was to be learnt from good novels and romances than from the gravest treatises on history and morality, yet there are few works to which I am oftener tempted to turn for profit or delight than to the standard productions in this species of composition. We find there a close imitation of men and manners; we see the very web and texture of society as it really exists, and as we meet with it when we come into the world. If poetry has "something more divine in



it," this savours more of humanity. We are brought acquainted with the motives and characters of mankind, imbibe our notions of virtue and vice from practical examples, and are taught a knowledge of the world through the airy medium of romance. As a record of past manners and opinions, too, such writings afford the best and fullest information. For example, I should be at a loss where to find in any authentic documents of the same period so satisfactory an account of the general state of society, and of moral, political, and religious feeling in the reign of George II., as we meet with in the "*Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams.*" This work, indeed, I take to be a perfect piece of statistics in its kind. In looking into any regular history of that period, into a learned and eloquent charge to a grand jury or the clergy of a diocese, or into a tract on controversial divinity, we should hear only of the ascendancy of the Protestant succession, the horrors of Popery, the triumph of civil and religious liberty, the wisdom and moderation of the sovereign, the happiness of the subject, and the flourishing state of manufactures and commerce. But if we really wish to know what all these fine-sounding names come to, we cannot do better than turn to the works of those who, having no other object than to imitate nature, could only hope for success from the fidelity of their pictures, and were bound (in self-defence) to reduce the boasts of vague theorists and the exaggerations of angry disputants to the mortifying standard of reality. Extremes are said to meet; and the works of imagination, as they are called, sometimes come the nearest to truth and nature. Fielding, in speaking on this subject and vindicating the use and dignity of the style of writing in which he excelled against the loftier pretensions of professed historians, says that in their productions nothing is true but the names and dates, whereas in his everything is true but the names and dates. If so, he has the advantage on his side.

I will here confess, however, that I am a little prejudiced on the point in question, and that the effect of many fine speculations has been lost upon me, from an early familiarity with the most striking passages in the work to which I have just alluded. Thus nothing can be more captivating than the description somewhere given by Mr. Burke of the indissoluble connection between learning and nobility, and of the respect universally paid by wealth to piety and morals. But the effect of this ideal representation has always been spoiled by my recollection of Parson Adams sitting over his cup of ale in Sir Thomas Booby's kitchen. Echard "*On the Contempt of the Clergy*" is, in like manner, a very good book, and "worthy of all acceptance;" but, somehow, an unlucky impression of the reality

of Parson Trulliber involuntarily checks the emotions of respect to which it might otherwise give rise; while, on the other hand, the lecture which Lady Booby reads to Lawyer Scout on the immediate expulsion of Joseph and Fanny from the parish casts no very favourable light on the flattering accounts of our practical jurisprudence which are to be found in "Blackstone" or "De Lolme." The most moral writers, after all, are those who do not pretend to inculcate any moral. The professed moralist almost unavoidably degenerates into the partisan of a system; and the philosopher is too apt to warp the evidence to his own purpose. But the painter of manners gives the facts of human nature, and leaves us to draw the inference: if we are not able to do this, or do it ill, at least it is our own fault.

The first-rate writers in this class of course are few; but those few we may reckon among the greatest ornaments and best benefactors of our kind. There is a certain set of them who, as it were, take their rank by the side of reality, and are appealed to as evidence on all questions concerning human nature. The principal of these are Cervantes and Le Sage, who may be considered as having been naturalised among ourselves; and, of native English growth, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, and Sterne.<sup>1</sup> As this is a department of criticism which deserves more attention than has been usually bestowed upon it, I shall here venture to recur (not from choice, but necessity) to what I have said upon it in a well-known periodical publication, and endeavour to contribute my mite towards settling the standard of excellence, both as to degree and kind, in these several writers.

### CERVANTES AND LE SAGE.

I SHALL begin with the history of the renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha, who presents something more stately, more romantic, and at the same time more real to the imagination than any other hero upon record. His lineaments, his accoutrements, his paste-board vizor, are familiar to us; and Mambrino's helmet still glitters in the sun! We not only feel the greatest love and veneration for the knight himself, but a certain respect for all those connected with him—the curate and Master Nicolas the barber, Sancho and Dapple, and even for Rosinante's leanness and his errors. Perhaps

<sup>1</sup> It is not to be forgotten that the author of "Robinson Crusoe" was also an Englishman. His other works, such as the "Life of Colonel Jack," &c., are of the same cast, and leave an impression on the mind more like that of things than words.

there is no work which combines so much whimsical invention with such an air of truth. Its popularity is almost unequalled; and yet its merits have not been sufficiently understood. The story is the least part of them; though the blunders of Sancho, and the unlucky adventures of his master, are what naturally catch the attention of the majority of readers. The pathos and dignity of the sentiments are often disguised under the ludicrousness of the subject, and provoke laughter when they might well draw tears. The character of Don Quixote himself is one of the most perfect disinterestedness. He is an enthusiast of the most amiable kind: of a nature equally open, gentle, and generous: a lover of truth and justice; and one who had brooded over the fine dreams of chivalry and romance, till they had robbed him of himself, and cheated his brain into a belief of their reality. There cannot be a greater mistake than to consider "Don Quixote" as a merely satirical work, or as a vulgar attempt to explode "the long-forgotten order of chivalry." There could be no need to explode what no longer existed. Besides, Cervantes himself was a man of the most sanguine and enthusiastic temperament; and even through the crazed and battered figure of the knight, the spirit of chivalry shines out with undiminished lustre; as if the author had half-designed to revive the example of past ages, and once more "witch the world with noble horsemanship." Oh! if ever the mouldering flame of Spanish liberty is destined to break forth, wrapping the tyrant and the tyranny in one consuming blaze, that the spark of generous sentiment and romantic enterprise, from which it must be kindled, has not been quite extinguished will perhaps be owing to thee, Cervantes, and to thy "Don Quixote!"

The character of Sancho is not more admirable in itself than as a relief to that of the knight. The contrast is as picturesque and striking as that between the figures of Rosinante and Dapple. Never was there so complete a *partie quarreë*:—they answer to one another at all points. Nothing need surpass the truth of physiognomy in the description of the master and man, both as to body and mind; the one lean and tall, the other round and short; the one heroical and courteous, the other selfish and servile; the one full of high-flown fancies, the other a bag of proverbs; the one always starting some romantic scheme, the other trying to keep to the safe side of custom and tradition. The gradual ascendancy, however, obtained by Don Quixote over Sancho is as finely managed as it is characteristic. Credulity and a love of the marvellous are as natural to ignorance as selfishness and cunning. Sancho by degrees becomes a kind of lay-brother of the order; acquires a taste

for adventures in his own way, and is made all but an entire convert, by the discovery of the hundred crowns in one of his most comfortless journeys. Towards the end, his regret at being forced to give up the pursuit of knight-errantry almost equals his master's; and he seizes the proposal of Don Quixote for them to turn shepherds with the greatest avidity—still applying it in his own fashion; for while the Don is ingeniously torturing the names of his humble acquaintance into classical terminations, and contriving scenes of gallantry and song, Sancho exclaims, "Oh, what delicate wooden spoons shall I carve! what crumbs and cream shall I devour!"—forgetting, in his milk and fruits, the pullets and geese at Camacho's wedding.

This intuitive perception of the hidden analogies of things, or, as it may be called, this *instinct of the imagination*, is, perhaps, what stamps the character of genius on the productions of art more than any other circumstance; for it works unconsciously like nature, and receives its impressions from a kind of inspiration. There is as much of this indistinct keeping and involuntary unity of purpose in Cervantes as in any author whatever. Something of the same unsettled, rambling humour extends itself to all the subordinate parts and characters of the work. Thus we find the curate confidentially informing Don Quixote, that if he could get the ear of the Government, he has something of considerable importance to propose for the good of the State; and our adventurer afterwards (in the course of his peregrinations) meets with a young gentleman who is a candidate for poetical honours, with a mad lover, a forsaken damsel, a Mahometan lady converted to the Christian faith, &c.—all delineated with the same truth, wildness, and delicacy of fancy. The whole work breathes that air of romance, that aspiration after imaginary good, that indescribable longing after something more than we possess, that in all places and in all conditions of life,

—"still prompts the eternal sigh,  
For which we wish to live, or dare to die!"

The leading characters in "Don Quixote" are strictly individuals; that is, they do not so much belong to as form a class by themselves. In other words, the actions and manners of the chief *dramatis personæ* do not arise out of the actions and manners of those around them, or the situation of life in which they are placed, but out of the peculiar dispositions of the persons themselves, operated upon by certain impulses of caprice and accident. Yet these impulses are so true to nature, and their operation so exactly described, that we not only recognise the fidelity of the representa-

tion, but recognise it with all the advantages of novelty superadded. They are in the best sense *originals*, namely, in the sense in which nature has her originals. They are unlike anything we have seen before—may be said to be purely ideal, and yet identify themselves more readily with our imagination, and are retained more strongly in memory, than perhaps any others: they are never lost in the crowd. One test of the truth of this ideal painting is the number of allusions which “Don Quixote” has furnished to the whole of civilised Europe; that is to say, of appropriate cases and striking illustrations of the universal principles of our nature. The detached incidents and occasional descriptions of human life are more familiar and obvious; so that we have nearly the same insight here given us into the characters of innkeepers, barmaids, hostlers, and puppet-show men that we have in Fielding. There is a much greater mixture, however, of the pathetic and sentimental with the quaint and humorous, than there ever is in Fielding. I might instance the story of the countryman whom Don Quixote and Sancho met in their doubtful search after Dulcinea, driving his mules to plough at break of day, and “singing the ancient ballad of Roncesvalles!” The episodes which are frequently introduced are excellent, but have, upon the whole, been overrated. They derive their interest from their connection with the main story. We are so pleased with that, that we are disposed to receive pleasure from everything else. Compared, for instance, with the serious tales of Boccaccio, they are slight and somewhat superficial. That of Marcella the fair shepherdess is, I think, the best. I shall only add, that “Don Quixote” was, at the time it was published, an entirely original work in its kind, and that the author claims the highest honour which can belong to one, that of being the inventor of a new style of writing. I have never read his “Galatea,” nor his “Loves of Persiles and Sigismunda,” though I have often meant to do it, and I hope to do so yet. Perhaps there is a reason lurking at the bottom of this dilatoriness. I am quite sure the reading of these works could not make me think higher of the author of “Don Quixote,” and it might, for a moment or two, make me think less.

There is another Spanish novel, “Gusman D’Alfarache,” nearly of the same age as “Don Quixote,” and of great genius, though it can hardly be ranked as a novel or a work of imagination. It is a series of strange, unconnected adventures, rather dryly told, but accompanied by the most severe and sarcastic commentary. The satire, the wit, the eloquence and reasoning, are of the most potent kind; but they are didactic rather than dramatic. They would suit a homily or a pasquinade as well [as] or better than a romance.

Still there are in this extraordinary book occasional sketches of character and humorous descriptions to which it would be difficult to produce anything superior. This work, which is hardly known in this country except by name, has the credit without any reason of being the original of "*Gil Blas*." There is one incident the same, that of the unsavoury ragout which is served up for supper at the inn. In all other respects these two works are the very reverse of each other, both in their excellences and defects. "*Lazarillo de Tormes*" has been more read than the "*Spanish Rogue*," and is a work more readable, on this account among others, that it is contained in a duodecimo instead of a folio volume. This, however, is long enough, considering that it treats of only one subject, that of eating, or rather the possibility of living without eating. Famine is here framed into an art, and feasting is banished far hence. The hero's time and thoughts are taken up in a thousand shifts to procure a dinner; and that failing, in tampering with his stomach till supper-time, when, being forced to go supperless to bed, he comforts himself with the hopes of a breakfast the next morning, of which being again disappointed, he reserves his appetite for a luncheon, and then has to stave it off again by some meagre excuse or other till dinner; and so on, by a perpetual adjournment of this necessary process, through the four-and-twenty hours round. The quantity of food proper to keep body and soul together is reduced to a minimum; and the most uninviting morsels with which *Lazarillo* meets once a week as a God's-send are pampered into the most sumptuous fare by a long course of inanition. The scene of this novel could be laid nowhere so properly as in Spain, that land of priestcraft and poverty, where hunger seems to be the ruling passion, and starving the order of the day.

"*Gil Blas*" has, next to "*Don Quixote*," been more generally read and admired than any other novel; and in one sense deservedly so; for it is at the head of its class, though that class is very different from, and I should say inferior to, the other. There is little individual character in "*Gil Blas*." The author is a describer of manners, and not of character. He does not take the elements of human nature, and work them up into new combinations (which is the excellence of "*Don Quixote*"), nor trace the peculiar and shifting shades of folly and knavery as they are to be found in real life (like *Fielding*); but he takes off, as it were, the general, habitual impression which circumstances make on certain conditions of life, and moulds all his characters accordingly. All the persons whom he introduces carry about with them the badge of their profession; and you see little more of them than their costume. He describes

men as belonging to distinct classes in society; not as they are in themselves, or with the individual differences which are always to be discovered in nature. His hero, in particular, has no character but that of the successive circumstances in which he is placed. His priests are only described as priests: his valets, his players, his women, his courtiers and his sharpers, are all alike. Nothing can well exceed the monotony of the work in this respect, at the same time that nothing can exceed the truth and precision with which the general manners of these different characters are preserved, nor the felicity of the particular traits by which their common foibles are brought out. Thus the Archbishop of Granada will remain an everlasting memento of the weakness of human vanity; and the account of Gil Blas' legacy, of the uncertainty of human expectations. This novel is also deficient in the fable as well as in the characters. It is not a regularly constructed story, but a series of amusing adventures told with equal gaiety and good sense, and in the most graceful style imaginable.

It has been usual to class our own great novelists as imitators of one or other of these two writers. Fielding, no doubt, is more like "Don Quixote" than "Gil Blas;" Smollett is more like "Gil Blas" than "Don Quixote;" but there is not much resemblance in either case. Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" is a more direct instance of imitation; Richardson can scarcely be called an imitator of any one; or if he is, it is of the sentimental refinement of Marivaux, or of the verbose gallantry of the writers of the seventeenth century.

There is very little to warrant the common idea that Fielding was an imitator of Cervantes, except his own declaration of such an intention in the title-page of "Joseph Andrews," the romantic turn of the character of Parson Adams (the only romantic character in his works), and the proverbial humour of Partridge, which is kept up only for a few pages. Fielding's novels are, in general, thoroughly his own; and they are thoroughly English. What they are most remarkable for is neither sentiment, nor imagination, nor wit, nor even humour, though there is an immense deal of this last quality; but profound knowledge of human nature, at least of English nature, and masterly pictures of the characters of men as he saw them existing. This quality distinguishes all his works, and is shown almost equally in all of them. As a painter of real life, he was equal to Hogarth: as a mere observer of human nature, he was little inferior to Shakspeare, though without any of the genius and poetical qualities of his mind. His humour is less rich and laughable than Smollett's; his wit as often misses as hits; he has none of the fine pathos of Richardson or Sterne; but he has brought together a

greater variety of characters in common life, marked with more distinct peculiarities and without an atom of caricature, than any other novel-writer whatever. The extreme subtlety of observation on the springs of human conduct in ordinary characters is only equalled by the ingenuity of contrivance in bringing those springs into play, in such a manner as to lay open their smallest irregularity. The detection is always complete, and made with the certainty and skill of a philosophical experiment, and the obviousness and familiarity of a casual observation. The truth of the imitation is indeed so great, that it has been argued that Fielding must have had his materials ready-made to his hands, and was merely a transcriber of local manners and individual habits. For this conjecture, however, there seems to be no foundation. His representations, it is true, are local and individual; but they are not the less profound and conclusive. The feeling of the general principles of human nature, operating in particular circumstances, is always intense, and uppermost in his mind; and he makes use of incident and situation only to bring out character.

It is scarcely necessary to give any illustrations. *Tom Jones* is full of them. There is the account, for example, of the gratitude of the elder Blifil to his brother, for assisting him to obtain the fortune of Miss Bridget Alworthy by marriage; and of the gratitude of the poor in his neighbourhood to Alworthy himself, who had done so much good in the country that he had made every one in it his enemy. There is the account of the Latin dialogues between Partridge and his maid, of the assault made on him during one of these by Mrs. Partridge, and the severe bruises he patiently received on that occasion, after which the parish of Little Baddington rang with the story that the schoolmaster had killed his wife. There is the exquisite keeping in the character of Blifil, and the want of it in that of Jones. There is the gradation in the lovers of Molly Seagrim; the philosopher Square succeeding to Tom Jones, who again finds that he himself had succeeded to the accomplished Will Barnes, who had the first possession of her person, and had still possession of her heart, Jones being only the instrument of her vanity, as Square was of her interest. Then there is the discreet honesty of Black George, the learning of Thwackum and Square, and the profundity of Squire Western, who considered it as a physical impossibility that his daughter should fall in love with Tom Jones. We have also that gentleman's disputes with his sister, and the inimitable appeal of that lady to her niece:—"I was never so handsome as you, Sophy: yet I had something of you formerly. I was called the cruel Parthenissa. Kingdoms and



states, as Tully Cicero says, undergo alteration, and so must the human form!" The adventure of the same lady with the highwayman, who robbed her of her jewels while he complimented her beauty, ought not to be passed over, nor that of Sophia and her muff, nor the reserved coquetry of her cousin Fitzpatrick, nor the description of Lady Bellaston, nor the modest overtures of the pretty widow Hunt, nor the indiscreet babblings of Mrs. Honour. The moral of this book has been objected to without much reason; but a more serious objection has been made to the want of refinement and elegance in two principal characters. We never feel this objection, indeed, while we are reading the book; but at other times we have something like a lurking suspicion that Jones was but an awkward fellow, and Sophia a pretty simpleton. I do not know how to account for this effect, unless it is that Fielding's constantly assuring us of the beauty of his hero, and the good sense of his heroine, at last produces a distrust of both. The story of "Tom Jones" is allowed to be unrivalled; and it is this circumstance, together with the vast variety of characters, that has given the "History of a Foundling" so decided a preference over Fielding's other novels. The characters themselves, both in "Amelia" and "Joseph Andrews," are quite equal to any of those in "Tom Jones." The account of Miss Matthews and Ensign Hibbert, in the former of these; the way in which that lady reconciles herself to the death of her father; the inflexible Colonel Bath; the insipid Mrs. James, the complaisant Colonel Trent, the demure, sly, intriguing, equivocal Mrs. Bennet, the lord who is her seducer, and who attempts afterwards to seduce Amelia by the same mechanical process of a concert-ticket, a book, and the disguise of a great-coat; his little, fat, short-nosed, red-faced, good-humoured accomplice, the keeper of the lodging-house, who, having no pretensions to gallantry herself, has a disinterested delight in forwarding the intrigues and pleasures of others (to say nothing of honest Atkinson, the story of the miniature picture of Amelia, and the hashed mutton, which are in a different style), are masterpieces of description. The whole scene at the lodging-house, the masquerade, &c., in "Amelia" are equal in interest to the parallel scenes in "Tom Jones," and even more refined in the knowledge of character. For instance, Mrs. Bennet is superior to Mrs. Fitzpatrick in her own way. The uncertainty in which the event of her interview with her former seducer is left is admirable. Fielding was a master of what may be called the *double entendre* of character, and surprises you no less by what he leaves in the dark (hardly known to the persons themselves) than by the unexpected discoveries he makes of the real traits and circumstances in a character

with which, till then, you find you were unacquainted. There is nothing at all heroic, however, in the usual style of his delineations. He does not draw lofty characters or strong passions; all his persons are of the ordinary stature as to intellect, and possess little elevation of fancy or energy of purpose. Perhaps, after all, Parson Adams is his finest character. It is equally true to nature, and more ideal than any of the others. Its unsuspecting simplicity makes it not only more amiable, but doubly amusing, by gratifying the sense of superior sagacity in the reader. Our laughing at him does not once lessen our respect for him. His declaring that he would willingly walk ten miles to fetch his sermon on vanity, merely to convince Wilson of his thorough contempt of this vice, and his consoling himself for the loss of his "*Æschylus*" by suddenly recollecting that he could not read it if he had it, because it is dark, are among the finest touches of *naïveté*. The night-adventures at Lady Booby's with Beau Didapper and the amiable Slipslop are the most ludicrous; and that with the huntsman, who draws off the hounds from the poor Parson, because they would be spoiled by following *vermin*, the most profound. Fielding did not often repeat himself; but Dr. Harrison, in "*Amelia*," may be considered as a variation of the character of Adams: so also is Goldsmith's "*Vicar of Wakefield*;" and the latter part of that work, which sets out so delightfully, an almost entire plagiarism from Wilson's account of himself, and Adams's domestic history.

Smollett's first novel, "*Roderick Random*," which is also his best, appeared about the same time as Fielding's "*Tom Jones*;" and yet it has a much more modern air with it; but this may be accounted for from the circumstance that Smollett was quite a young man at the time, whereas Fielding's manner must have been formed long before. The style of "*Roderick Random*" is more easy and flowing than that of "*Tom Jones*;" the incidents follow one another more rapidly (though, it must be confessed, they never come in such a throng, or are brought out with the same dramatic effect); the humour is broader and as effectual; and there is very nearly, if not quite, an equal interest excited by the story. What, then, is it that gives the superiority to Fielding? It is the superior insight into the springs of human character, and the constant development of that character through every change of circumstance. Smollett's humour often rises from the situation of the persons, or the peculiarity of their external appearance, as from Roderick Random's carrotty locks, which hung down over his shoulders like a pound of candles; or Strap's ignorance of London, and the blunders that follow from it. There is a tone of vulgarity about all his productions. The incidents fre-

quently resemble detached anecdotes taken from a newspaper or magazine; and, like those in "Gil Blas," might happen to a hundred other characters. He exhibits the ridiculous accidents and reverses to which human life is liable, not "the stuff" of which it is composed. He seldom probes to the quick, or penetrates beyond the surface; and therefore he leaves no stings in the minds of his readers, and in this respect is far less interesting than Fielding. His novels always enliven, and never tire us: we take them up with pleasure, and lay them down without any strong feeling of regret. We look on and laugh, as spectators of a highly amusing scene, without closing in with the combatants or being made parties in the event. We read "Roderick Random" as an entertaining story; for the particular accidents and modes of life which it describes have ceased to exist; but we regard "Tom Jones" as a real history, because the author never stops short of those essential principles which lie at the bottom of all our actions, and in which we feel an immediate interest—*intus et in cute*. Smollett excels most as the lively caricaturist, Fielding as the exact painter and profound metaphysician. I am far from maintaining that this account applies uniformly to the productions of these two writers; but I think that, as far as they essentially differ, what I have stated is the general distinction between them. "Roderick Random" is the purest of Smollett's novels: I mean in point of style and description. Most of the incidents and characters are supposed to have been taken from the events of his own life, and are therefore truer to nature. There is a rude conception of generosity in some of his characters, of which Fielding seems to have been incapable, his amiable persons being merely good-natured. It is owing to this that Strap is superior to Partridge, as there is a heartiness and warmth of feeling in some of the scenes between Lieutenant Bowling and his nephew, which is beyond Fielding's power of impassioned writing. The whole of the scene on ship-board is a most admirable and striking picture, and, I imagine, very little if at all exaggerated, though the interest it excites is of a very unpleasant kind, because the irritation and resistance to petty oppression can be of no avail. The picture of the little profligate French friar, who was Roderick's travelling companion, and of whom he always kept to the windward, is one of Smollett's most masterly sketches. "Peregrine Pickle" is no great favourite of mine, and "Launcelot Greaves" was not worthy of the genius of the author.

"Humphry Clinker" and "Count Fathom" are both equally admirable in their way. Perhaps the former is the most pleasant gossiping novel that ever was written: that which gives the most

pleasure with the least effort to the reader. It is quite as amusing as going the journey could have been; and we have just as good an idea of what happened on the road as if we had been of the party. Humphry Clinker himself is exquisite; and his sweetheart, Winifred Jenkins, not much behind him. Matthew Bramble, though not altogether original, is excellently supported, and seems to have been the prototype of Sir Anthony Absolute in the "Rivals." But Lismahago is the flower of the flock. His tenaciousness in argument is not so delightful as the relaxation of his logical severity, when he finds his fortune mellowing in the wintry smiles of Mrs. Tabitha Bramble. This is the best-preserved and most severe of all Smollett's characters. The resemblance to "Don Quixote" is only just enough to make it interesting to the critical reader without giving offence to anybody else. The indecency and filth in this novel are what must be allowed to all Smollett's writings. The subject and characters in "Count Fathom" are, in general, exceedingly disgusting: the story is also spun out to a degree of tediousness in the serious and sentimental parts; but there is more power of writing occasionally shown in it than in any of his works. I need only refer to the fine and bitter irony of the Count's address to the country of his ancestors on his landing in England; to the robber-scene in the forest, which has never been surpassed; to the Parisian swindler who personates a raw English country squire (Western is tame in the comparison); and to the story of the seduction in the west of England. It would be difficult to point out, in any author, passages written with more force and mastery than these.

It is not a very difficult undertaking to class Fielding or Smollett—the one as an observer of the characters of human life, the other as a describer of its various eccentricities. But it is by no means so easy to dispose of Richardson, who was neither an observer of the one nor a describer of the other, but who seemed to spin his materials entirely out of his own brain, as if there had been nothing existing in the world beyond the little room in which he sat writing. There is an artificial reality about his works, which is nowhere else to be met with. They have the romantic air of a pure fiction, with the literal minuteness of a common diary. The author had the strongest matter-of-fact imagination that ever existed, and wrote the oddest mixture of poetry and prose. He does not appear to have taken advantage of anything in actual nature, from one end of his works to the other; and yet, throughout all his works, voluminous as they are—and this, to be sure, is one reason why they are so—he sets about describing every object and transaction as if the whole had been given in on evidence by an eye-witness. This

kind of high finishing from imagination is an anomaly in the history of human genius; and certainly nothing so fine was ever produced by the same accumulation of minute parts. There is not the least distraction, the least forgetfulness of the end: every circumstance is made to tell. I cannot agree that this exactness of detail produces heaviness; on the contrary, it gives an appearance of truth, and a positive interest to the story; and we listen with the same attention as we should to the particulars of a confidential communication. I at one time used to think some parts of "Sir Charles Grandison" rather trifling and tedious, especially the long description of Miss Harriet Byron's wedding-clothes, till I was told of two young ladies who had severally copied out the whole of that very description for their own private gratification. After that, I could not blame the author.

The effect of reading this work is like an increase of kindred. You find yourself all of a sudden introduced into the midst of a large family, with aunts and cousins to the third and fourth generation, and grandmothers both by the father's and mother's side; and a very odd set of people they are, but people whose real existence and personal identity you can no more dispute than your own senses, for you see and hear all that they do or say. What is still more extraordinary, all this extreme elaborateness in working out the story seems to have cost the author nothing; for it is said that the published works are mere abridgments. I have heard (though this, I suspect, must be a pleasant exaggeration) that "Sir Charles Grandison" was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes.

Pamela is the first of Richardson's productions, and the very child of his brain. Taking the general idea of the character of a modest and beautiful country girl, and of the ordinary situation in which she is placed, he makes out all the rest, even to the smallest circumstance, by the mere force of a reasoning imagination. It would seem as if a step lost would be as fatal here as in a mathematical demonstration. The development of the character is the most simple, and comes the nearest to nature that it can do, without being the same thing. The interest of the story increases with the dawn of understanding and reflection in the heroine: her sentiments gradually expand themselves, like opening flowers. She writes better every time, and acquires a confidence in herself, just as a girl would do writing such letters in such circumstances; and yet it is certain *that no girl would write such letters in such circumstances*. What I mean is this—Richardson's nature is always the nature of sentiment and reflection, not of impulse or situation. He furnishes his characters, on every occasion,

with the presence of mind of the author. He makes them act, not as they would from the impulse of the moment, but as they might upon reflection, and upon a careful review of every motive and circumstance in their situation. They regularly sit down to write letters; and if the business of life consisted in letter-writing, and was carried on by the post (like a Spanish game at chess), human nature would be what Richardson represents it. All actual objects and feelings are blunted and deadened by being presented through a medium which may be true to reason, but is false in nature. He confounds his own point of view with that of the immediate actors in the scene, and hence presents you with a conventional and factitious nature, instead of that which is real. Dr. Johnson seems to have preferred this truth of reflection to the truth of nature, when he said that there was more knowledge of the human heart in a page of Richardson than in all Fielding. Fielding, however, saw more of the practical results, and understood the principles as well; but he had not the same power of speculating upon their possible results, and combining them in certain ideal forms of passion and imagination, which was Richardson's real excellence.

It must be observed, however, that it is this mutual good understanding, and comparing of notes between the author and the persons he describes: his infinite circumspection, his exact process of ratiocination and calculation, which gives such an appearance of coldness and formality to most of his characters—which makes prudes of his women, and coxcombs of his men. Everything is too conscious in his works. Everything is distinctly brought home to the mind of the actors in the scene, which is a fault undoubtedly; but then it must be confessed everything is brought home in its full force to the mind of the reader also, and we feel the same interest in the story as if it were our own. Can anything be more beautiful or more affecting than Pamela's reproaches to her "lumpish heart," when she is sent away from her master's at her own request: its lightness, when she is sent for back: the joy which the conviction of the sincerity of his love diffuses in her heart, like the coming on of spring; the artifice of the stuff gown: the meeting with Lady Davers after her marriage: and the trial-scene with her husband? Who ever remained insensible to the passion of Lady Clementina. except Sir Charles Grandison himself, who was the object of it? Clarissa is, however, his masterpiece, if we except *Lovelace*. If she is fine in herself, she is still finer in his account of her. With that foil her purity is dazzling indeed; and she who could triumph by her virtue and the force of her love over the regality of *Lovelace's* mind, his

wit, his person, his accomplishments, and his spirit, conquers all hearts. I should suppose that never sympathy more deep or sincere was excited than by the heroine of Richardson's romance, except by the calamities of real life. The links in this wonderful chain of interest are not more finely wrought than their whole weight is overwhelming and irresistible. Who can forget the exquisite gradations of her long dying scene, or the closing of the coffin-lid, when Miss Howe comes to take her last leave of her friend; or the heart-breaking reflection that Clarissa makes on what was to have been her wedding-day? Well does a certain writer exclaim—

“ Books are a real world, both pure and good,  
Round which, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,  
Our pastime and our happiness may grow ! ”

Richardson's wit was unlike that of any other writer : his humour was so too. Both were the effect of intense activity of mind : laboured, and yet completely effectual. I might refer to Lovelace's reception and description of Hickman, when he calls out Death in his ear, as the name of the person with whom Clarissa had fallen in love, and to the scene at the glove-shop. What can be more magnificent than his enumeration of his companions—“ Pelt n, so pert and so pimply : Tourville, so fair and so foppish,” &c. ? In casuistry this author is quite at home ; and with a boldness greater even than his puritanical severity, [he] has exhausted every topic on virtue and vice. There is another peculiarity in Richardson not perhaps so uncommon, which is his systematically preferring his most insipid characters to his finest, though both were equally his own invention, and he must be supposed to have understood something of their qualities. Thus he preferred the little, selfish, affected, insignificant Miss Byron to the divine Clementina, and, again, Sir Charles Grandison to the nobler Lovelace. I have nothing to say in favour of Lovelace's morality ; but Sir Charles is the prince of coxcombs, whose eye was never once taken from his own person and his own virtues, and there is nothing which excites so little sympathy as this excessive egotism.

It remains to speak of Sterne ; and I shall do it in few words. There is more of *mannerism* and affectation in him, and a more immediate reference to preceding authors ; but his excellences, where he is excellent, are of the first order. His characters are intellectual and inventive, like Richardson's, but totally opposite in the execution. The one is made out by continuity and patient repetition of touches : the others, by glancing transitions and graceful apposition. His style is equally different from Richardson's : it is at times the

most rapid, the most happy, the most idiomatic of any that is to be found. It is the pure essence of English conversational style. His works consist only of *morceaux*—of brilliant passages. I wonder that Goldsmith, who ought to have known better, should call him “a dull fellow.” His wit is poignant, though artificial; and his characters (though the groundwork of some of them had been laid before) have yet invaluable original differences; and the spirit of the execution, the master-strokes constantly thrown into them, are not to be surpassed. It is sufficient to name them:—Yorick, Dr. Slop, Mr. Shandy, My Uncle Toby, Trim, Susanna, and the Widow Wadman. In these he has contrived to oppose with equal felicity and originality two characters, one of pure intellect, and the other of pure good-nature, in My Father and My Uncle Toby. There appears to have been in Sterne a vein of dry, sarcastic humour, and of extreme tenderness of feeling; the latter sometimes carried to affectation, as in the tale of “Maria” and the apostrophe to the recording angel; but at other times pure and without blemish. The story of Le Fevre is perhaps the finest in the English language. My Father’s restlessness, both of body and mind, is inimitable. It is the model from which all those despicable performances against modern philosophy ought to have been copied, if their authors had known anything of the subject they were writing about. My Uncle Toby is one of the finest compliments ever paid to human nature. He is the most unoffending of God’s creatures; or, as the French express it, *un tel petit bon homme!* Of his bowling-green, his sieges, and his amours, who would say or think anything amiss? . . .

In knowledge, in variety, in facility, in truth of painting, in costume and scenery, in freshness of subject and in untired interest, in glancing lights and the graces of a style passing at will from grave to gay, from lively to severe, at once romantic and familiar, having the utmost force of imitation and apparent freedom of invention, the Waverley novels have the highest claims to admiration. What lack they yet? The author has all power given him from without—he has not, perhaps, an equal power from within. The intensity of the feeling is not equal to the distinctness of the imagery. He sits like a magician in his cell, and conjures up all shapes and sights to the view; and with a little variation we might apply to him what Spenser says of Fancy:—

“ His chamber was depainted all within  
 With sundry colours, in which were writ  
 Infinite shape of things dispersed thin;  
 Some such as in the world were never yet;



Some daily seen and known by their names,  
 Such as in idle fantasies do flit ;  
 Infernal hags, centaurs, fiends, hippodames,  
 Apes, liones, eagles, owls, fools, lovers, children, dames."

In the midst of all this phantasmagoria, the author himself never appears to take part with his characters, to prompt our affection to the good or sharpen our antipathy to the bad. It is the perfection of art to conceal art; and this is here done so completely, that while it adds to our pleasure in the work, it seems to take away from the merit of the author. As he does not thrust himself forward in the foreground, he loses the credit of the performance. The copies are so true to nature, that they appear like tapestry figures taken off by the pattern—the obvious patchwork of tradition and history. His characters are transplanted at once from their native soil to the page which we are reading, without any traces of their having passed through the hotbed of the author's genius or vanity. He leaves them as he found them; but this is doing wonders. The Laird and the Bailie of Bradwardine, the idiot rhymers David Gellatly, Miss Rose Bradwardine and Miss Flora Mac Ivor, her brother the Highland Jacobite chieftain, Vich Ian Vohr, the Highland rover, Donald Bean Lean, and the worthy page Callum Beg, Bothwell and Balfour of Burley, Claverhouse and Macbriar, Elshie, the Black Dwarf, and the Red Reeve of Westburn Flat, Hobbie and Grace Armstrong, Lucy Bertram and Dominie Sampson, Dirk Hatteraick and Meg Merrilies, are at present "familiar in our mouths as household names," and whether they are actual persons or creations of the poet's pen is an impertinent inquiry. The picturesque and local scenery is as fresh as the lichen on the rock: the characters are a part of the scenery. If they are put in action, it is a moving picture: if they speak, we hear their dialect and the tones of their voice. If the humour is made out by dialect, the character by the dress, the interest by the facts and documents in the author's possession, we have no right to complain, if it is made out; but sometimes it hardly is, and then we have a right to say so. For instance, in the "Tales of my Landlord," Canny Elshie is not in himself so formidable or petrific a person as the real Black Dwarf, called David Ritchie, nor are his acts or sayings so staggering to the imagination. Again, the first introduction of this extraordinary personage, groping about among the hoary twilight ruins of the Witch of Micklestane Moor and her Grey Geese, is as full of preternatural power and bewildering effect (according to the tradition of the country) as can be; while the last decisive scene, where the Dwarf, in his resumed character of Sir Edward Mauley, comes from the tomb in the chapel, to prevent the forced

marriage of the daughter of his former betrothed mistress with the man she abhors, is altogether powerless and tame. No situation could be imagined more finely calculated to call forth an author's powers of imagination and passion; but nothing is done. The assembly is dispersed under circumstances of the strongest natural feeling and the most appalling preternatural appearances, just as if the effect had been produced by a peace-officer entering for the same purpose. These instances of a falling off are, however, rare; and if this author should not be supposed by fastidious critics to have original genius in the highest degree, he has other qualities which supply its place so well: his materials are so rich and varied, and he uses them so lavishly, that the reader is no loser by the exchange. We are not in fear that he should publish another novel; we are under no apprehension of his exhausting himself, for he has shown that he is inexhaustible.

[*Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, 1821. *Second Edition*, 1821. *Third Edition*, 1840. *Fourth Edition*, 1873.]

## GENERAL VIEW OF THE SUBJECT.

THE age of Elizabeth was distinguished beyond, perhaps, any other in our history by a number of great men, famous in different ways, and whose names have come down to us with unblemished honours: statesmen, warriors, divines, scholars, poets, and philosophers; Raleigh, Drake, Coke, Hooker, and—high and more sounding still, and still more frequent in our mouths—Shakspeare, Spenser, Sidney, Bacon, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, men whom Fame has eternised in her long and lasting scroll, and who, by their words and acts, were benefactors of their country and ornaments of human nature. Their attainments of different kinds bore the same general stamp, and it was sterling; what they did had the mark of their age and country upon it. Perhaps the genius of Great Britain never shone out fuller or brighter, or looked more like itself, than at this period. Our writers and great men had something in them that savoured of the soil from which they grew: they were not French; they were not Dutch, or German, or Greek, or Latin; they were truly English. They did not look out of themselves to see what they should be; they sought for truth and nature, and found it in themselves. There was no tinsel, and but little art; they were not the spoilt children of affectation and refinement, but a bold, vigorous, inde-

pendent race of thinkers, with prodigious strength and energy, with none but natural grace and heart-felt, unobtrusive delicacy. They were not at all sophisticated. The mind of their country was great in them, and it prevailed. With their learning and unexampled acquirement, they did not forget that they were men: with all their endeavours after excellence, they did not lay aside the strong original bent and character of their minds. What they performed was chiefly nature's handiwork; and Time has claimed it for his own. To these, however, might be added others not less learned, nor with a scarce less happy vein, but less fortunate in the event, who, though as renowned in their day, have sunk into "mere oblivion," and of whom the only record (but that the noblest) is to be found in their works. Their works and their names, "poor, poor dumb names," are all that remains of such men as Webster, Decker, Marston, Marlowe, Chapman, Heywood, Middleton, and Rowley! "How lov'd, how honour'd once, avails them not:" though they were the friends and fellow-labourers of Shakspeare, sharing his fame and fortunes with him, the rivals of Jonson, and the masters of Beaumont and Fletcher's well-sung woes! They went out one by one unnoticed, like evening lights, or were swallowed up in the headlong torrent of puritanic zeal which succeeded, and swept away everything in its unsparing course, throwing up the wrecks of taste and genius at random, and at long fitful intervals, amidst the painted gewgaws and foreign frippery of the reign of Charles II., and from which we are only now recovering the scattered fragments and broken images to erect a temple to true Fame! How long before it will be completed?

If I can do anything to rescue some of these writers from hopeless obscurity, and to do them right, without prejudice to well-deserved reputation, I shall have succeeded in what I chiefly propose. I shall not attempt, indeed, to adjust the spelling or restore the pointing, as if the genius of poetry lay hid in errors of the press, but, leaving these weightier matters of criticism to those who are more able and willing to bear the burden, try to bring out their real beauties to the eager sight, "draw the curtain of Time, and show the picture of Genius," restraining my own admiration within reasonable bounds!

There is not a lower ambition, a poorer way of thought, than that which would confine all excellence, or arrogate its final accomplishment, to the present or modern times. We ordinarily speak and think of those who had the misfortune to write or live before us as labouring under very singular privations and disadvantages in not having the benefit of those improvements which we have made,

as buried in the grossest ignorance, or the slaves "of poring pedantry;" and we make a cheap and infallible estimate of their progress in civilisation upon a graduated scale of perfectibility, calculated from the meridian of our own times. If we have pretty well got rid of the narrow bigotry that would limit all sense or virtue to our own country, and have fraternised, like true cosmopolites, with our neighbours and contemporaries, we have made our self-love amends by letting the generation we live in engross nearly all our admiration, and by pronouncing a sweeping sentence of barbarism and ignorance on our ancestry backwards, from the commencement (as near as can be) of the nineteenth or the latter end of the eighteenth century. From thence we date a new era, the dawn of our own intellect and that of the world, like "the sacred influence of light" glimmering on the confines of Chaos and old night; new manners rise, and all the cumbrous "pomp of elder days" vanishes, and is lost in worse than Gothic darkness. Pavilioned in the glittering pride of our superficial accomplishments and upstart pretensions, we fancy that everything beyond that magic circle is prejudice and error, and all before the present enlightened period but a dull and useless blank in the great map of Time. We are so dazzled with the gloss and novelty of modern discoveries, that we cannot take into our mind's eye the vast expanse, the lengthened perspective of human intellect, and a cloud hangs over and conceals its loftiest monuments, if they are removed to a little distance from us—the cloud of our own vanity and short-sightedness. The modern sciolist *stultifies* all understanding but his own, and that which he conceives like his own. We think, in this age of reason and consummation of philosophy, because we knew nothing twenty or thirty years ago, and began to think then, for the first time in our lives, that the rest of mankind were in the same predicament, and never knew anything till we did; that the world had grown old in sloth and ignorance, had dreamt out its long minority of five thousand years in a dozing state, and that it first began to wake out of sleep, to rouse itself, and look about it, startled by the light of our unexpected discoveries, and the noise we made about them. Strange error of our infatuated self-love! Because the clothes we remember to have seen worn when we were children are now out of fashion, and our grandmothers were then old women, we conceive, with magnanimous continuity of reasoning, that it must have been much worse three hundred years before, and that grace, youth, and beauty are things of modern date—as if nature had ever been old, or the sun had first shone on our folly and presumption. Because, in a word, the last generation, when tottering off the stage, were not so active, so

sprightly, and so promising as we were, we begin to imagine that people formerly must have crawled about in a feeble, torpid state, like flies in winter, in a sort of dim twilight of the understanding; "nor can we think what thoughts they could conceive," in the absence of all those topics that so agreeably enliven and diversify our conversation and literature, mistaking the imperfection of our knowledge for the defect of their organs, as if it was necessary for us to have a register and certificate of their thoughts, or as if, because they did not see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and understand with our understandings, they could hear, see, and understand nothing. A falser inference could not be drawn, nor one more contrary to the maxims and cautions of a wise humanity. "Think," says Shakspeare, the prompter of good and true feelings, "there's lovers out of Britain." So there have been thinkers, and great and sound ones, before our time. They had the same capacities that we have, sometimes greater motives for their exertion, and, for the most part, the same subject-matter to work upon. What we learn from nature, we may hope to do as well as they; what we learn from them, we may in general expect to do worse. What is, I think, as likely as anything to cure us of this overweening admiration of the present and unmingled contempt for past times is the looking at the finest old pictures: at Raphael's heads, at Titian's faces, at Claude's landscapes. We have there the evidence of the senses, without the alterations of opinion or disguise of language. We there see the blood circulate through the veins (long before it was known that it did so), the same red and white "by Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on," the same thoughts passing through the mind and seated on the lips, the same blue sky and glittering sunny vales, "where Pan, knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance, leads on the eternal spring." And we begin to feel that nature and the mind of man are not a thing of yesterday, as we had been led to suppose, and that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." Or grant that we improve, in some respects, in a uniformly progressive ratio, and build, Babel-high, on the foundation of other men's knowledge, as in matters of science and speculative inquiry, where, by going often over the same general ground, certain general conclusions have been arrived at, and in the number of persons reasoning on a given subject truth has at last been hit upon and long-established error exploded; yet this does not apply to cases of individual power and knowledge, to a million of things beside, in which we are still to seek as much as ever, and in which we can only hope to find by going to the fountain-head of thought and experience. We are

quite wrong in supposing (as we are apt to do) that we can plead an exclusive title to wit and wisdom, to taste and genius, as the net produce and clear reversion of the age we live in, and that all we have to do to be great is to despise those who have gone before us as nothing. . . .

It is the present fashion to speak with veneration of old English literature; but the homage we pay to it is more akin to the rites of superstition than the worship of true religion. Our faith is doubtful, our love cold, our knowledge little or none. We now and then repeat the names of some of the old writers by rote; but we are shy of looking into their works. Though we seem disposed to think highly of them, and to give them every credit for a masculine and original vein of thought, as a matter of literary courtesy and enlargement of taste, we are afraid of coming to the proof, as too great a trial of our candour and patience. We regard the enthusiastic admiration of these obsolete authors, or a desire to make proselytes to a belief in their extraordinary merits, as an amiable weakness, a pleasing delusion, and prepare to listen to some favourite passage that may be referred to in support of this singular taste with an incredulous smile; and are in no small pain for the result of the hazardous experiment, feeling much the same awkward condescending disposition to patronise these first crude attempts at poetry and lisplings of the Muse as when a fond parent brings forward a bashful child to make a display of its wit or learning. We hope the best, put a good face on the matter, but are sadly afraid the thing cannot answer. Dr. Johnson said of these writers generally, that "they were sought after because they were scarce, and would not have been scarce had they been much esteemed." His decision is neither true history nor sound criticism. They were esteemed, and they deserved to be so.

One cause that might be pointed out here as having contributed to the long-continued neglect of our earlier writers lies in the very nature of our academic institutions, which unavoidably neutralises a taste for the productions of native genius, estranges the mind from the history of our own literature, and makes it in each successive age like a book sealed. The Greek and Roman classics are a sort of privileged text-books, the standing order of the day, in a university education, and leave little leisure for a competent acquaintance with or due admiration of a whole host of able writers of our own, who are suffered to moulder in obscurity on the shelves of our libraries, with a decent reservation of one or two top-names, that are cried up for form's sake, and to save the national character. Thus we keep a few of these always ready in capitals, and strike off

the rest, to preven<sup>t</sup> the tendency to a superfluous population in the republic of letters; in other words, to prevent the writers from becoming more numerous than the readers. The ancients are become effete in this respect: they no longer increase and multiply; or, if they have imitators among us, no one is expected to read, and still less to admire, them. It is not possible that the learned professors and the reading public should clash in this way, or necessary for them to use any precautions against each other. But it is not the same with the living languages, where there is danger of being overwhelmed by the crowd of competitors; and pedantry has combined with ignorance to cancel their unsatisfied claims.

We affect to wonder at Shakspeare and one or two more of that period, as solitary instances upon record; whereas it is our own dearth of information that makes the waste; for there is no time more populous of intellect or more prolific of intellectual wealth than the one we are speaking of. Shakspeare did not look upon himself in this light, as a sort of monster of poetical genius, or on his contemporaries as "less than smallest dwarfs," when he speaks with true, not false, modesty of himself and them and of his wayward thoughts, "desiring this man's art, and that man's scope." We fancy that there were no such men that could either add to or take anything away from him, but such there were. He indeed over-looks and commands the admiration of posterity, but he does it from the *tableland* of the age in which he lived. He towered above his fellows, "in shape and gesture proudly eminent;" but he was one of a race of giants—the tallest, the strongest, the most graceful and beautiful of them. But it was a common and a noble brood. He was not something sacred and aloof from the vulgar herd of men, but shook hands with Nature and the circumstances of the time, and is distinguished from his immediate contemporaries, not in kind, but in degree and greater variety of excellence. He did not form a class or species by himself, but belonged to a class or species. His age was necessary to him; nor could he have been wrenched from his place, in the edifice of which he was so conspicuous a part, without equal injury to himself and it. Mr. Wordsworth says of Milton, that "his soul was like a star, and dwelt apart." This cannot be said with any propriety of Shakspeare, who certainly moved in a constellation of bright luminaries, and "drew after him a third part of the heavens." If we allow, for argument's sake (or for truth's, which is better), that he was in himself equal to all his competitors put together, yet there was more dramatic excellence in that age than in the whole of the period that has elapsed since. If his contemporaries, with their

united strength, would hardly make one Shakspeare, certain it is that all his successors would not make half a one. With the exception of a single writer, Otway, and of a single play of his ("Venice Preserved"), there is nobody in tragedy and dramatic poetry (I do not here speak of comedy) to be compared to the great men of the age of Shakspeare and immediately after. They are a mighty phalanx of kindred spirits closing him round, moving in the same orbit, and impelled by the same causes in their whirling and eccentric career. They had the same faults and the same excellences; the same strength and depth and richness; the same truth of character, passion, imagination, thought, and language, thrown, heaped, massed together without careful polishing or exact method, but poured out in unconcerned profusion from the lap of Nature and Genius in boundless and unrivalled magnificence. The sweetness of Decker, the thought of Marston, the gravity of Chapman, the grace of Fletcher and his young-eyed wit, Jonson's learned sock, the flowing vein of Middleton, Heywood's ease, the pathos of Webster, and Marlowe's deep designs, add a double lustre to the sweetness, thought, gravity, grace, wit, artless nature, copiousness, ease, pathos, and sublime conceptions of Shakspeare's Muse. They are indeed the scale by which we can best ascend to the true knowledge and love of him. Our admiration of them does not lessen our relish for him, but, on the contrary, increases and confirms it. For such an extraordinary combination and development of fancy and genius many causes may be assigned; and we may seek for the chief of them in religion, in politics, in the circumstances of the time, the recent diffusion of letters, in local situation, and in the character of the men who adorned that period, and availed themselves so nobly of the advantages placed within their reach.

I shall here attempt to give a general sketch of these causes, and of the manner in which they operated to mould and stamp the poetry of the country at the period of which I have to treat, independently of incidental and fortuitous causes, for which there is no accounting, but which, after all, have often the greatest share in determining the most important results.

The first cause I shall mention as contributing to this general effect was the Reformation, which had just then taken place. This event gave a mighty impulse and increased activity to thought and inquiry, and agitated the inert mass of accumulated prejudices throughout Europe. The effect of the concussion was general; but the shock was greatest in this country. It toppled down the full-grown, intolerable abuses of centuries at a blow; heaved the ground from under the feet of bigoted faith and slavish obedience; and the



roar and dashing of opinions, loosened from their accustomed hold, might be heard like the noise of an angry sea, and has never yet subsided. Germany first broke the spell of misbegotten fear, and gave the watchword; but England joined the shout, and echoed it back with her island voice, from her thousand cliffs and craggy shores, in a longer and a louder strain. With that cry the genius of Great Britain rose, and threw down the gauntlet to the nations. There was a mighty fermentation: the waters were out; public opinion was in a state of projection. Liberty was held out to all to think and speak the truth. Men's brains were busy; their spirits stirring; their hearts full; and their hands not idle. Their eyes were opened to expect the greatest things, and their ears burned with curiosity and zeal to know the truth, that the truth might make them free. The death-blow which had been struck at scarlet vice and bloated hypocrisy loosened their tongues, and made the talismans and love-tokens of Popish superstition, with which she had beguiled her followers and committed abominations with the people, fall harmless from their necks.

The translation of the Bible was the chief engine in the great work. It threw open, by a secret spring, the rich treasures of religion and morality, which had been there locked up as in a shrine. It revealed the visions of the prophets, and conveyed the lessons of inspired teachers (such they were thought) to the meanest of the people. It gave them a common interest in the common cause. Their hearts burnt within them as they read. It gave a *mind* to the people, by giving them common subjects of thought and feeling. It cemented their union of character and sentiment; it created endless diversity and collision of opinion. They found objects to employ their faculties, and a motive in the magnitude of the consequences attached to them, to exert the utmost eagerness in the pursuit of truth, and the most daring intrepidity in maintaining it. Religious controversy sharpens the understanding by the subtlety and remoteness of the topics it discusses, and braces the will by their infinite importance. We perceive in the history of this period a nervous masculine intellect. No levity, no feebleness, no indifference; or, if there were, it is a relaxation from the intense activity which gives a tone to its general character. But there is a gravity approaching to piety; a seriousness of impression, a conscientious severity of argument, an habitual fervour and enthusiasm in their mode of handling almost every subject. The debates of the schoolmen were sharp and subtle enough; but they wanted interest and grandeur, and were, besides, confined to a few: they did not affect the general mass of the community. But the

Bible was thrown open to all ranks and conditions "to run and read," with its wonderful Table of Contents from Genesis to the Revelations. Every village in England would present the scene so well described in Burns's "Cotter's Saturday Night." I cannot think that all this variety and weight of knowledge could be thrown in all at once upon the mind of a people, and not make some impression upon it, the traces of which might be discerned in the manners and literature of the age. For to leave more disputable points, and take only the historical parts of the Old Testament, or the moral sentiments of the New, there is nothing like them in the power of exciting awe and admiration, or of riveting sympathy. We see what Milton has made of the account of the Creation, from the manner in which he has treated it, imbued and impregnated with the spirit of the time of which we speak. Or what is there equal (in that romantic interest and patriarchal simplicity which goes to the heart of a country, and rouses it, as it were, from its lair in wastes and wildernesses) to the story of Joseph and his Brethren, of Rachel and Laban, of Jacob's Dream, of Ruth and Boaz, the descriptions in the Book of Job, the deliverance of the Jews out of Egypt, or the account of their captivity and return from Babylon? There is in all these parts of the Scripture, and numberless more of the same kind, to pass over the Orphic hymns of David, the prophetic denunciations of Isaiah, or the gorgeous visions of Ezekiel, an originality, a vastness of conception, a depth and tenderness of feeling, and a touching simplicity in the mode of narration, which he who does not feel need be made of no "penetrable stuff." There is something in the character of Christ, too (leaving religious faith quite out of the question), of more sweetness and majesty, and more likely to work a change in the mind of man, by the contemplation of its idea alone, than any to be found in history, whether actual or feigned. This character is that of a sublime humanity, such as was never seen on earth before nor since. This shone manifestly both in His words and actions. We see it in His washing the disciples' feet the night before His death, that unspeakable instance of humility and love, above all art, all meanness, and all pride, and in the leave He took of them on that occasion: "My peace I give unto you; that peace which the world cannot give, give I unto you;" and in His last commandment, that "they should love one another." Who can read the account of His behaviour on the cross, when, turning to His mother, He said, "Woman, behold thy son," and to the disciple John, "Behold thy mother," and "from that hour that disciple took her to his own home," without having his heart smote within him? We see it in His treatment of

the woman taken in adultery, and in His excuse for the woman who poured precious ointment on His garment as an offering of devotion and love, which is here all in all. His religion was the religion of the heart. We see it in His discourse with the disciples as they walked together towards Emmaus, when their hearts burned within them; in His Sermon from the Mount, in His parable of the Good Samaritan, and in that of the Prodigal Son—in every act and word of His life a grace, a mildness, a dignity and love, a patience and wisdom worthy of the Son of God. His whole life and being were imbued, steeped in this word, *charity*; it was the spring, the well-head from which every thought and feeling gushed into act; and it was this that breathed a mild glory from His face in that last agony upon the cross, “when the meek Saviour bowed His head and died,” praying for His enemies. He was the first true teacher of morality; for He alone conceived the idea of a pure humanity. He redeemed man from the worship of that idol, self, and instructed him by precept and example to love his neighbour as himself, to forgive our enemies, to do good to those that curse us and spitefully use us. He taught the love of good for the sake of good, without regard to personal or sinister views, and made the affections of the heart the sole seat of morality, instead of the pride of the understanding or the sternness of the will. In answering the question, “Who is our neighbour?” as one who stands in need of our assistance, and whose wounds we can bind up, He has done more to humanise the thoughts and tame the unruly passions than all who have tried to reform and benefit mankind. The very idea of abstract benevolence, of the desire to do good because another wants our services, and of regarding the human race as one family, the offspring of one common parent, is hardly to be found in any other code or system. It was “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.” The Greeks and Romans never thought of considering others, but as they were Greeks or Romans, as they were bound to them by certain positive ties, or, on the other hand, as separated from them by fiercer antipathies. Their virtues were the virtues of political machines; their vices were the vices of demons, ready to inflict or to endure pain with obdurate and remorseless inflexibility of purpose. But in the Christian religion “we perceive a softness coming over the heart of a nation, and the iron scales that fence and harden it melt and drop off.” It becomes malleable, capable of pity, of forgiveness, of relaxing in its claims and remitting its power. We strike it, and it does not hurt us: it is not steel or marble, but flesh and blood, clay tempered with tears, and “soft as sinews of the new-born babe.” The Gospel was first preached to the poor, for it consulted their

wants and interests, not its own pride and arrogance. It first promulgated the equality of mankind in the community of duties and benefits. It denounced the iniquities of the chief priests and Pharisees, and declared itself at variance with principalities and powers, for it sympathises not with the oppressor but the oppressed. It first abolished slavery, for it did not consider the power of the will to inflict injury as clothing it with a right to do so. Its law is good, not power. It at the same time tended to wean the mind from the grossness of sense, and a particle of its divine flame was lent to brighten and purify the lamp of love!

There have been persons who, being sceptics as to the Divine mission of Christ, having taken an unaccountable prejudice to His doctrines, and have been disposed to deny the merit of His character; but this was not the feeling of the great men in the age of Elizabeth (whatever might be their belief), one of whom says of Him, with a boldness equal to its piety:

"The best of men  
That e'er wore earth about Him was a sufferer;  
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit;  
The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

This was old honest Decker, and the lines ought to embalm his memory to every one who has a sense either of religion, or philosophy, or humanity, or true genius. Nor can I help thinking that we may discern the traces of the influence exerted by religious faith in the spirit of the poetry of the age of Elizabeth, in the means of exciting terror and pity, in the delineation of the passions of grief, remorse, love, sympathy, the sense of shame, in the fond desires, the longings after immortality, in the heaven of hope and the abyss of despair it lays open to us.

The literature of this age, then, I would say, was strongly influenced (among other causes), first by the spirit of Christianity, and secondly by the spirit of Protestantism.

The effects of the Reformation on politics and philosophy may be seen in the writings and history of the next and of the following ages. They are still at work, and will continue to be so. The effects on the poetry of the time were chiefly confined to the moulding of the character, and giving a powerful impulse to the intellect of the country. The immediate use or application that was made of religion to subjects of imagination and fiction was not (from an obvious ground of separation) so direct or frequent as that which was made of the classical and romantic literature.

For much about the same time, the rich and fascinating stores of the Greek and Roman mythology, and those of the romantic poetry

of Spain and Italy, were eagerly explored by the curious, and thrown open in translations to the admiring gaze of the vulgar. This last circumstance could hardly have afforded so much advantage to the poets of that day, who were themselves, in fact, the translators, as it shows the general curiosity and increasing interest in such subjects as a prevailing feature of the times. There were translations of Tasso by Fairfax, and of Ariosto by Harrington, of Homer and Hesiod by Chapman, and of Virgil long before, and Ovid soon after; there was Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, of which Shakespeare has made such admirable use in his "Coriolanus" and "Julius Cæsar;" and Ben Jonson's tragedies of "Catiline" and "Sejanus" may themselves be considered as almost literal translations into verse of Tacitus, Sallust, and Cicero's "Orations" in his consulship. Boccaccio, the divine Boccaccio, Petrarch, Dante, the satirist Aretine, Machiavel, Castiglione, and others were familiar to our writers, and they make occasional mention of some few French authors, as Ronsard and Du Bartas; for the French literature had not at this stage arrived at its Augustan period, and it was the imitation of their literature a century afterwards, when it had arrived at its greatest height (itself copied from the Greek and Latin), that enfeebled and impoverished our own. But of the time that we are considering it might be said, without much extravagance, that every breath that blew, that every wave that rolled to our shores, brought with it some accession to our knowledge, which was engrafted on the national genius. In fact, all the disposable materials that had been accumulating for a long period of time, either in our own or in foreign countries, were now brought together, and required nothing more than to be wrought up, polished, or arranged in striking forms, for ornament and use. To this every inducement prompted: the novelty of the acquisition of knowledge in many cases, the emulation of foreign wits and of immortal works, the want and the expectation of such works among ourselves, the opportunity and encouragement afforded for their production by leisure and affluence; and, above all, the insatiable desire of the mind to beget its own image, and to construct out of itself, and for the delight and admiration of the world and posterity, that excellence of which the idea exists hitherto only in its own breast, and the impression of which it would make as universal as the eye of Heaven, the benefit as common as the air we breathe. The first impulse of genius is to create what never existed before: the contemplation of that which is so created is sufficient to satisfy the demands of taste; and it is the habitual study and imitation of the original models that takes away the power and even wish to do the

like. Taste limps after genius, and from copying the artificial models we lose sight of the living principle of nature. It is the effort we make and the impulse we acquire in overcoming the first obstacles that projects us forward; it is the necessity for exertion that makes us conscious of our strength; but this necessity and this impulse once removed, the tide of fancy and enthusiasm, which is at first a running stream, soon settles and crusts into the standing pool of dulness, criticism, and *vertu*.

What also gave an unusual impetus to the mind of man at this period was the discovery of the New World and the reading of voyages and travels. Green islands and golden sands seemed to arise, as by enchantment, out of the bosom of the watery waste, and invite the cupidity or wing the imagination of the dreaming speculator. Fairyland was realised in new and unknown worlds. "Fortunate fields and groves and flowery vales, thrice happy isles," were found floating, "like those Hesperian gardens famed of old," beyond Atlantic seas, as dropped from the zenith. The people, the soil, the clime, everything gave unlimited scope to the curiosity of the traveller and reader. Other manners might be said to enlarge the bounds of knowledge, and new mines of wealth were tumbled at our feet. It is from a voyage to the Straits of Magellan that Shakspeare has taken the hint of Prospero's Enchanted Island, and of the savage Caliban with his god Setebos. Spenser seems to have had the same feeling in his mind in the production of his "Faëry Queen," and vindicates his poetic fiction on this very ground of analogy. . . .

Lastly, to conclude this account: What gave a unity and common direction to all these causes was the natural genius of the country, which was strong in these writers in proportion to their strength. We are a nation of islanders, and we cannot help it, nor mend ourselves if we would. We are something in ourselves, nothing when we try to ape others. Music and painting are not our *forte*; for what we have done in that way has been little, and that borrowed from others with great difficulty. But we may boast of our poets and philosophers. That's something. We have had strong heads and sound hearts among us. Thrown on one side of the world, and left to bustle for ourselves, we have fought out many a battle for truth and freedom. That is our natural style; and it were to be wished we had in no instance departed from it. Our situation has given us a certain cast of thought and character, and our liberty has enabled us to make the most of it. We are of a stiff clay, not moulded into every fashion, with stubborn joints not easily bent. We are slow to think, and therefore impressions do not work upon

us till they act in masses. We are not forward to express our feelings, and therefore they do not come from us till they force their way in the most impetuous eloquence. Our language is, as it were, to begin anew, and we make use of the most singular and boldest combinations to explain ourselves. Our wit comes from us, "like birdlime, brains and all." We pay too little attention to form and method, leave our works in an unfinished state, but still the materials we work in are solid and of Nature's mint; we do not deal in counterfeits. We both under and over do, but we keep an eye to the prominent features, the main chance. We are more for weight than show; care only about what interests ourselves, instead of trying to impose upon others by plausible appearances, and are obstinate and intractable in not conforming to common rules, by which many arrive at their ends with half the real waste of thought and trouble. We neglect all but the principal object, gather our force to make a great blow, bring it down, and relapse into sluggishness and indifference again. *Materiam superabat opus* cannot be said of us. We may be accused of grossness, but not of flimsiness; of extravagance, but not of affectation; of want of art and refinement, but not of a want of truth and nature. Our literature, in a word, is Gothic and grotesque, unequal and irregular, not cast in a previous mould, nor of one uniform texture, but of great weight in the whole, and of incomparable value in the best parts. It aims at an excess of beauty or power, hits or misses, and is either very good indeed or absolutely good for nothing. This character applies in particular to our literature in the age of Elizabeth, which is its best period, before the introduction of a rage for French rules and French models; for, whatever may be the value of our own original style of composition, there can be neither offence nor presumption in saying, that it is at least better than our second-hand imitations of others. Our understanding (such as it is and must remain to be good for anything) is not a thoroughfare for commonplaces, smooth as the palm of one's hand, but full of knotty points and jutting excrescences, rough, uneven, overgrown with brambles; and I like this aspect of the mind (as some one said of the country), where nature keeps a good deal of the soil in her own hands. Perhaps the genius of our poetry has more of Pan than of Apollo; "but Pan is a god, Apollo is no more!"

#### WEBSTER AND DECKER.

It remains for me to say something of Webster and Decker. For these two writers I do not know how to show my regard and admira-

tion sufficiently. Noble-minded Webster, gentle-hearted Decker, how may I hope to "express ye unblamed," and repay to your neglected manes some part of the debt of gratitude I owe for proud and soothing recollections? I pass by the "Appius and Virginia" of the former, which is, however, a good, sensible, solid tragedy, cast in a framework of the most approved models, with little to blame or praise in it, except the affecting speech of Appius to Virginia just before he kills her; as well as Decker's "Wonder of a Kingdom," his Jacomo Gentili, that truly ideal character of a magnificent patron, and Old Fortunatus and his Wishing-cap, which last has the idle garrulity of age, with the freshness and gaiety of youth still upon its cheek and in its heart. These go into the common catalogue, and are lost in the crowd; but Webster's "Vittoria Corombona" I cannot so soon part with; and old honest Decker's Signor Orlando Friscobaldo I shall never forget! I became only of late acquainted with this last-mentioned worthy character, but the bargain between us is, I trust, for life. We sometimes regret that we had not sooner met with characters like these, that seem to raise, revive, and give a new zest to our being. Vain the complaint! We should never have known their value if we had not known them always: they are old, very old acquaintance, or we should not recognise them at first sight. We only find in books what is already written within "the red-leaved tables of our hearts." The pregnant materials are there; "the pangs, the internal pangs are ready; and poor humanity's afflicted will struggling in vain with ruthless destiny." But the reading of fine poetry may indeed open the bleeding wounds, or pour balm and consolation into them, or sometimes even close them up for ever! . . .

#### THE EARLY DRAMATISTS—APOSTROPHE.

. . . IN short, the great characteristic of the elder dramatic writers is, that there is nothing theatrical about them. In reading them you only think how the persons into whose mouths certain sentiments are put would have spoken or looked: in reading Dryden and others of that school you only think, as the authors themselves seem to have done, how they would be ranted on the stage by some buskined hero or tragedy-queen. In this respect, indeed, some of his more obscure contemporaries have the advantage over Shakspeare himself, inasmuch as we have never seen their works represented on the stage; and there is no stage-trick to remind us of it. The characters of their heroes have not been cut down to fit into the prompt-book, nor have we ever seen their names flaring in the play-bills in small



or large capitals. I do not mean to speak disrespectfully of the stage; but I think still higher of nature, and next to that, of books. They are the nearest to our thoughts: they wind into the heart; the poet's verse slides into the current of our blood. We read them when young; we remember them when old. We read there of what has happened to others; we feel that it has happened to ourselves. They are to be had everywhere cheap and good. We breathe but the air of books: we owe everything to their authors, on this side barbarism; and we pay them easily with contempt while living, and with an epitaph when dead! Michael Angelo is beyond the Alps; Mrs. Siddons has left the stage, and us to mourn her loss. Were it not so, there are neither picture-galleries nor theatres-royal on Salisbury Plain, where I write this; but here, even here, with a few old authors, I can manage to get through the summer or the winter months without ever knowing what it is to feel *ennui*. They sit with me at breakfast; they walk out with me before dinner. After a long walk through unfrequented tracks, after starting the hare from the fern, or hearing the wing of the raven rustling above my head, or being greeted by the woodman's "stern good-night," as he strikes into his narrow homeward path, I can "take mine ease at mine inn," beside the blazing hearth, and shake hands with Signor Orlando Friscobaldo, as the oldest acquaintance I have. Ben Jonson, learned Chapman, Master Webster, and Master Heywood are there, and seated round, discourse the silent hours away. Shakspeare is there himself, not in Cibber's manager's coat. Spenser is hardly yet returned from a ramble through the woods, or is concealed behind a group of nymphs, fawns, and satyrs. Milton lies on the table, as on an altar, never taken up or laid down without reverence. Lyly's Endymion sleeps with the moon, that shines in at the window, and a breath of wind stirring at a distance seems a sigh from the tree under which he grew old. Faustus disputes in one corner of the room with fiendish faces, and reasons of divine astrology. Bellafont soothes Mattheo, Vittoria triumphs over her judges, and old Chapman repeats one of the hymns of Homer, in his own fine translation! I should have no objection to pass my life in this manner out of the world, not thinking of it, nor it of me: neither abused by my enemies nor defended by my friends; careless of the future, but sometimes dreaming of the past, which might as well be forgotten. Mr. Wordsworth has expressed this sentiment well (perhaps I have borrowed it from him):

" Books, dreams, are each a world ; and books, we know,  
Are a substantial world, both pure and good,

Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,  
Our pastime and our happiness will grow.

Two shall be named pre-eminently dear,  
The gentle lady married to the Moor,  
And heavenly Una with her milk-white lamb.

Blessings be with them and eternal praise,  
The poets, who on earth have made us heirs  
Of truth and pure delight in deathless lays.  
Oh, might my name be number'd among theirs,  
Then gladly would I end my mortal days!"

I have no sort of pretension to join in the concluding wish of the last stanza; but I trust the writer feels that this aspiration of his early and highest ambition is already not unfulfilled!

## BACON.

BACON has been called (and justly) one of the wisest of mankind. The word *wisdom* characterises him more than any other. It was not that he did so much himself to advance the knowledge of man or nature, as that he saw what others had done to advance it, and what was still wanting to its full accomplishment. He stood upon the high vantage-ground of genius and learning, and traced, "as in a map the voyager his course," the long devious march of human intellect, its elevations and depressions, its windings and its errors. He had a "large discourse of reason, looking before and after." He had made an exact and extensive survey of human acquirements: he took the gauge and meter, the depths and soundings of the human capacity. He was master of the comparative anatomy of the mind of man, of the balance of power among the different faculties. He had thoroughly investigated and carefully registered the steps and processes of his own thoughts, with their irregularities and failures, their liabilities to wrong conclusions, either from the difficulties of the subject or from moral causes, from prejudice, indolence, vanity, from conscious strength or weakness; and he applied this self-knowledge on a mighty scale to the general advances or retrograde movements of the aggregate intellect of the world. He knew well what the goal and crown of moral and intellectual power was, how far men had fallen short of it, and how they came to miss it. He had an instantaneous perception of the quantity of truth or good in any given system, and of the analogy of any given result or principle to others of the same kind scattered through nature or history. His observations take in a larger range, have more pro-

fundity from the fineness of his tact, and more comprehension from the extent of his knowledge, along the line of which his imagination ran with equal celerity and certainty, than any other persons whose writings I know. He, however, seized upon these results rather by intuition than by inference: he knew them in their mixed modes and combined effects rather than by abstraction or analysis, as he explains them to others, not by resolving them into their component parts and elementary principles, so much as by illustrations drawn from other things operating in like manner and producing similar results; or as he himself has finely expressed it, "by the same footsteps of Nature treading or printing upon several subjects or matters." He had great sagacity of observation, solidity of judgment, and scope of fancy; in this resembling Plato and Burke, that he was a popular philosopher and a philosophical declaimer. His writings have the gravity of prose with the fervour and vividness of poetry. His sayings have the effect of axioms, are at once striking and self-evident. He views objects from the greatest height, and his reflections require a sublimity in proportion to their profundity, as in deep wells of water we see the sparkling of the highest fixed stars. The chain of thought reaches to the centre, and ascends the brightest heaven of invention. Reason in him works like an instinct, and his slightest suggestions carry the force of conviction. His opinions are judicial. His induction of particulars is alike wonderful for learning and vivacity, for curiosity and dignity, and an all-pervading intellect binds the whole together in a graceful and pleasing form. His style is equally sharp and sweet, flowing and pithy, condensed and expansive, expressing volumes in a sentence, or amplifying a single thought into pages of rich, glowing, and delightful eloquence. He had great liberality from seeing the various aspects of things (there was nothing bigoted or intolerant or exclusive about him), and yet he had firmness and decision from feeling their weight and consequences. His character was, then, an amazing insight into the limits of human knowledge and acquaintance with the landmarks of human intellect, so as to trace its past history or point out the path to future inquirers; but when he quits the ground of contemplation of what others have done or left undone to project himself into future discoveries, he becomes quaint and fantastic, instead of original. His strength was in reflection, not in production: he was the surveyor, not the builder, of the fabric of science. He had not strictly the constructive faculty. He was the principal pioneer in the march of modern philosophy, and has completed the education and discipline of the mind for the acquisition of truth, by explaining all the impediments or furtherances that can be applied to it or cleared

out of its way. In a word, he was one of the greatest men this country has to boast, and his name deserves to stand, where it is generally placed, by the side of those of our greatest writers, whether we consider the variety, the strength, or splendour of his faculties, for ornament or use. . . .

## SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE and Bishop Taylor were two prose-writers in the succeeding age, who, for pomp and copiousness of style, might be compared to Bacon. In all other respects they were opposed to him and to one another. As Bacon seemed to bend all his thoughts to the practice of life, and to bring home the light of science to "the bosoms and businesses of men," Sir Thomas Browne seemed to be of opinion that the only business of life was to think, and that the proper object of speculation was, by darkening knowledge, to breed more speculation, and "find no end in wandering mazes lost." He chose the incomprehensible and impracticable as almost the only subjects fit for a lofty and lasting contemplation, or for the exercise of a solid faith. He cried out for an *oh altitudo* beyond the heights of revelation, and posed himself with apocryphal mysteries, as the pastime of his leisure hours. He pushes a question to the utmost verge of conjecture, that he may repose on the certainty of doubt: and he removes an object to the greatest distance from him, that he may take a high and abstracted interest in it, consider it in its relation to the sum of things, not to himself, and bewilder his understanding in the universality of its nature and the inscrutableness of its origin. His is the sublime of indifference; a passion for the abstruse and imaginary. He turns the world round for his amusement, as if it was a globe of pasteboard. He looks down on sublunary affairs as if he had taken his station in one of the planets. The antipodes are next-door neighbours to him, and doomsday is not far off. With a thought he embraces both the poles; the march of his pen is over the great divisions of geography and chronology. Nothing touches him nearer than humanity. He feels that he is mortal only in the decay of nature and the dust of long-forgotten tombs. The finite is lost in the infinite. The orbits of the heavenly bodies or the history of empires are to him but a point in time or a speck in the universe. The great Platonic year revolves in one of his periods. Nature is too little for the grasp of his style. He scoops an antithesis out of fabulous antiquity, and rakes up an epithet from the sweepings of chaos. It is as if his books had dropped from the clouds, or as if Friar Bacon's head could speak.

He stands on the edge of the world of sense and reason, and gains a vertigo by looking down at impossibilities and chimeras. Or he busies himself with the mysteries of the Cabala or the enclosed secrets of the heavenly quincunxes, as children are amused with tales of the nursery. The passion of curiosity (the only passion of childhood) had in him survived to old age, and had superannuated his other faculties. He moralises and grows pathetic on a mere idle fancy of his own, as if thought and being were the same, or as if "all this world were one glorious lie." For a thing to have ever had a name is sufficient warrant to entitle it to respectful belief, and to invest it with all the rights of a subject and its predicates. He is superstitious, but not bigoted: to him all religions are much the same, and he says that he should not like to have lived in the time of Christ and the apostles, as it would have rendered his faith too gross and palpable. His gossiping egotism and personal character have been preferred unjustly to Montaigne's. He had no personal character at all, but the peculiarity of resolving all the other elements of his being into thought, and of trying experiments on his own nature in an exhausted receiver of idle and unsatisfactory speculations. All that he "differences himself by," to use his own expression, is this moral and physical indifference. In describing himself, he deals only in negatives. He says he has neither prejudices nor antipathies to manners, habits, climate, food, to persons or things; they were alike acceptable to him, as they afforded new topics for reflection; and he even professes that he could never bring himself heartily to hate the devil. He owns in one place of the "*Religio Medici*," that "he could be content if the species were continued like trees," and yet he declares that this was from no aversion to love, or beauty, or harmony; and the reasons he assigns to prove the orthodoxy of his taste in this respect is, that he was an admirer of the music of the spheres! He tells us that he often composed a comedy in his sleep. It would be curious to know the subject or the texture of the plot. It must have been something like Nabbes's "*Mask of Microcosmus*," of which the *dramatis personæ* have been already given; or else a misnomer, like Dante's "*Divine Comedy of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*." He was twice married, as if to show his disregard even for his own theory; and he had a hand in the execution of some old women for witchcraft, I suppose, to keep a decorum in absurdity, and to indulge an agreeable horror at his own fantastical reveries on the occasion. In a word, his mind seemed to converse chiefly with the intelligible forms, the spectral apparitions of things; he delighted in the preternatural and visionary, and he only existed at the circumference of his nature. He

had the most intense consciousness of contradictions and nonentities, and he decks them out in the pride and pedantry of words as if they were the attire of his proper person: the categories hang about his neck like the golden chain of knighthood, and he "walks gowned" in the intricate folds and sweeping drapery of dark sayings and impenetrable riddles! . . .

## JEREMY TAYLOR.

JEREMY TAYLOR was a writer as different from Sir Thomas Browne as it was possible for one writer to be from another. He was a dignitary of the Church, and except in matters of casuistry and controverted points, could not be supposed to enter upon speculative doubts or give a loose to a sort of dogmatical scepticism. He had less thought, less "stuff of the conscience," less "to give us pause," in his impetuous oratory, but he had equal fancy—not the same vastness and profundity, but more richness and beauty, more warmth and tenderness. He is as rapid, as flowing and endless, as the other is stately, abrupt, and concentrated. The eloquence of the one is like a river, that of the other is more like an aqueduct. The one is as sanguine as the other is saturnine in the temper of his mind. Jeremy Taylor took obvious and admitted truths for granted, and illustrated them with an inexhaustible display of new and enchanting imagery. Sir Thomas Browne talks in sum-totals: Jeremy Taylor enumerates all the particulars of a subject. He gives every aspect it will bear, and never "cloys with sameness." His characteristic is enthusiastic and delightful amplification. Sir Thomas Browne gives the beginning and end of things, that you may judge of their place and magnitude: Jeremy Taylor describes their qualities and texture, and enters into all the items of the debtor and creditor account between life and death, grace and nature, faith and good works. He puts his heart into his fancy. He does not pretend to annihilate the passions and pursuits of mankind in the pride of philosophic indifference, but treats them as serious and momentous things, warring with conscience and the soul's health, or furnishing the means of grace and hopes of glory. In his writings, the frail stalk of human life reclines on the bosom of eternity. His "Holy Living and Dying" is a divine pastoral. He writes to the faithful followers of Christ, as the shepherd pipes to his flock. He introduces touching and heartfelt appeals to familiar life; condescends to men of low estate; and his pious page blushes with modesty and beauty. His style is prismatic. It unfolds the colours of the rainbow; it floats like the bubble through the air; it is like innumerable dew-

drops that glitter on the face of morning, and tremble as they glitter. He does not dig his way underground, but slides upon ice, borne on the winged car of fancy. The dancing light he throws upon objects is like an aurora borealis, playing betwixt heaven and earth:

“Where pure Niemi’s faëry banks arise,  
And fringed with roses Tenglio rolls its stream.”

His exhortations to piety and virtue are a gay *memento mori*. He mixes up death’s-heads and amaranthine flowers; makes life a procession to the grave, but crowns it with gaudy garlands, and “rains sacrificial roses” on its path. In a word, his writings are more like fine poetry than any other prose whatever; they are a choral song in praise of virtue, and a hymn to the Spirit of the Universe.

### CONCLUSION.

I HAVE done: and if I have done no better, the fault has been in me, not in the subject. My liking to this grew with my knowledge of it; but so did my anxiety to do it justice. I somehow felt it as a point of honour not to make my hearers think less highly of some of these old writers than I myself did of them. If I have praised an author, it was because I liked him: if I have quoted a passage, it was because it pleased me in the reading: if I have spoken contemptuously of any one, it has been reluctantly. It is no easy task that a writer, even in so humble a class as myself, takes upon him; he is scouted and ridiculed if he fails; and if he succeeds, the enmity and cavils and malice with which he is assailed are just in proportion to his success. The coldness and jealousy of his friends not infrequently keep pace with the rancour of his enemies. They do not like you a bit the better for fulfilling the good opinion they always entertained of you. They would wish you to be always promising a great deal, and doing nothing, that they may answer for the performance. That shows their sagacity and does not hurt their vanity. An author wastes his time in painful study and obscure researches, to gain a little breath of popularity, and meets with nothing but vexation and disappointment in ninety-nine instances out of a hundred; or when he thinks to grasp the luckless prize, finds it not worth the trouble—the perfume of a minute, fleeting as a shadow, hollow as a sound; “as often got without merit as lost without deserving.” He thinks that the attainment of acknowledged excellence will secure him the expression of those feelings in others which the image and hope of it had excited in his own breast; but instead of that, he meets with

nothing (or scarcely nothing) but squint-eyed suspicion, idiot wonder, and grinning scorn. It seems hardly worth while to have taken all the pains he has been at for this!

In youth we borrow patience from our future years: the spring of hope gives us courage to act and suffer. A cloud is upon our onward path, and we fancy that all is sunshine beyond it. The prospect seems endless, because we do not know the end of it. We think that life is long because art is so, and that because we have much to do it is well worth doing: or that no exertions can be too great, no sacrifices too painful, to overcome the difficulties we have to encounter. Life is a continued struggle to be what we are not, and to do what we cannot. But as we approach the goal we draw in the reins; the impulse is less, as we have not so far to go: as we see objects nearer, we become less sanguine in the pursuit: it is not the despair of not attaining, so much as knowing that there is nothing worth obtaining, and the fear of having nothing left even to wish for, that damps our ardour and relaxes our efforts; and if the mechanical habit did not increase the facility, would, I believe, take away all inclination or power to do anything. We stagger on the few remaining paces to the end of our journey; make perhaps one final effort; and are glad when our task is done!

[*Table-Talk, or Original Essays on Men and Manners*, 2 vols., 1821-2. Second Edition, 1824. Third Edition, 1845-6. Fourth Edition, 1873. Many of these Essays originally appeared in the *London Magazine* and other Periodicals]

## THE PAST AND FUTURE.

I HAVE naturally but little imagination, and am not of a very sanguine turn of mind. I have some desire to enjoy the present good, and some fondness for the past; but I am not at all given to building castles in the air, nor to look forward with much confidence or hope to the brilliant illusions held out by the future. Hence I have perhaps been led to form a theory which is very contrary to the common notions and feelings on the subject, and which I will here try to explain as well as I can.

I cannot see, then, any rational or logical ground for that mighty difference in the value which mankind generally set upon the past and future, as if the one was everything and the other nothing—of no consequence whatever. On the other hand, I conceive that the past is as real and substantial a part of our being, that it is as



much a *bonâ fide*, undeniable consideration in the estimate of human life, as the future can possibly be. To say that the past is of no importance, unworthy of a moment's regard, because it has gone by and is no longer anything, is an argument that cannot be held to any purpose; for if the past has ceased to be, and is therefore to be accounted nothing in the scale of good or evil, the future is yet to come, and has never been anything. Should any one choose to assert that the present only is of any value in a strict and positive sense, because that alone has a real existence, that we should seize the instant good and give all else to the winds, I can understand what he means (though perhaps he does not himself); but I cannot comprehend how this distinction between that which has a downright and sensible and that which has only a remote and airy existence can be applied to establish the preference of the future over the past; for both are in this point of view equally ideal, absolutely nothing, except as they are conceived of by the mind's eye, and are thus rendered present to the thoughts and feelings. Nay, the one is even more imaginary, a more fantastic creature of the brain than the other, and the interest we take in it more shadowy and gratuitous; for the future, on which we lay so much stress, may never come to pass at all, that is, may never be embodied into actual existence in the whole course of events, whereas the past has certainly existed once, has received the stamp of truth, and left an image of itself behind. It is so far, then, placed beyond the possibility of doubt, or as the poet has it,

“Those joys are lodg'd beyond the reach of fate.”

It is not, however, attempted to be denied that though the future is nothing at present, and has no immediate interest while we are speaking, yet it is of the utmost consequence in itself, and of the utmost interest to the individual, because it *will have* a real existence, and we have an idea of it as existing in time to come. Well, then, the past also has no real existence; the actual sensation and the interest belonging to it are both fled; but it *has had* a real existence, and we can still call up a vivid recollection of it as having once been; and therefore, by parity of reasoning, it is not a thing perfectly insignificant in itself, nor wholly indifferent to the mind, whether it ever was or not. Oh no! Far from it! Let us not rashly quit our hold upon the past, when perhaps there may be little else left to bind us to existence. Is it nothing to have been, and to have been happy or miserable? Or is it a matter of no moment to think whether I have been one or the other? Do I delude myself, do I build upon a shadow or a dream, do I dress up in the gaudy

garb of idleness and folly a pure fiction, with nothing answering to it in the universe of things and the records of truth, when I look back with fond delight or with tender regret to that which was at one time to me *my all*, when I revive the glowing image of some bright reality,

“The thoughts of which can never from my heart”?

Do I then muse on nothing, do I bend my eyes on nothing, when I turn back in fancy to “those suns and skies so pure” that lighted up my early path? Is it to think of nothing, to set an idle value upon nothing, to think of all that has happened to me, and of all that can ever interest me? Or, to use the language of a fine poet (who is himself among my earliest and not least painful recollections):

“What though the radiance which was once so bright  
Be now for ever vanish’d from my sight,  
Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower?”—

yet am I mocked with a lie when I venture to think of it? Or do I not drink in and breathe again the air of heavenly truth when I but “retrace its footsteps, and its skirts far off adore”? I cannot say with the same poet:

“And see how dark the backward stream,  
A little moment past so smiling”—

for it is the past that gives me most delight and most assurance of reality. What to me constitutes the great charm of the “Confessions of Rousseau” is their turning so much upon this feeling. He seems to gather up the past moments of his being like drops of honey-dew to distil a precious liquor from them; his alternate pleasures and pains are the bead-roll that he tells over and piously worships; he makes a rosary of the flowers of hope and fancy that strewed his earliest years. When he begins the last of the “Reveries of a Solitary Walker,” “*Il y a aujourd’hui, jour des Pâques Fleuris, cinquante ans depuis que j’ai premier vu Madame Warens,*” what a yearning of the soul is implied in that short sentence! Was all that had happened to him, all that he had thought and felt in that sad interval of time, to be accounted nothing? Was that long, dim, faded retrospect of years happy or miserable—a blank that was not to make his eyes fail and his heart faint within him in trying to grasp all that had once filled it and that had since vanished, because it was not a prospect into futurity? Was he wrong in finding more to interest him in it than in the next fifty years—

which he did not live to see; or if he had, what then? Would they have been worth thinking of, compared with the times of his youth, of his first meeting with Madame Warens, with those times which he has traced with such truth and pure delight "in our heart's tables"? When "all the life of life was flown," was he not to live the first and best part of it over again, and once more be all that he then was?—Ye woods that crown the clear lone brow of Norman Court, why do I revisit ye so oft, and feel a soothing consciousness of your presence, but that your high tops waving in the wind recall to me the hours and years that are for ever fled; that ye renew in ceaseless murmurs the story of long-cherished hopes and bitter disappointment; that in your solitudes and tangled wilds I can wander and lose myself as I wander on and am lost in the solitude of my own heart; and that as your rustling branches give the loud blast to the waste below—borne on the thoughts of other years, I can look down with patient anguish at the cheerless desolation which I feel within! Without that face pale as the primrose with hyacinthine locks, for ever shunning and for ever haunting me, mocking my waking thoughts as in a dream; without that smile which my heart could never turn to scorn; without those eyes dark with their own lustre, still bent on mine, and drawing the soul into their liquid mazes like a sea of love; without that name trembling in fancy's ear; without that form gliding before me like Oread or Dryad in fabled groves, what should I do? how pass away the listless leaden-footed hours? Then wave, wave on, ye woods of Tuderley, and lift your high tops in the air; my sighs and vows uttered by your mystic voice breathe into me my former being, and enable me to bear the thing I am!—The objects that we have known in better days are the main props that sustain the weight of our affections, and give us strength to await our future lot. The future is like a dead wall or a thick mist hiding all objects from our view; the past is alive and stirring with objects, bright or solemn, and of unfading interest. What is it, in fact, that we recur to oftenest? What subjects do we think or talk of? Not the ignorant future, but the well-stored past. Othello, the Moor of Venice, amused himself and his hearers at the house of Signor Brabantio by "running through the story of his life even from his boyish days," and oft "beguiled them of their tears, when he did speak of some disastrous stroke which his youth suffered." This plan of ingratiating himself would not have answered if the past had been, like the contents of an old almanac, of no use but to be thrown aside and forgotten. What a blank, for instance, does the history of the world for the next six thousand years present to

the mind, compared with that of the last! All that strikes the imagination or excites any interest in the mighty scene is *what has been!*

Neither in itself, then, nor as a subject of general contemplation has the future any advantage over the past. But with respect to our grosser passions and pursuits it has. As far as regards the appeal to the understanding or the imagination, the past is just as good, as real, of as much intrinsic and ostensible value as the future; but there is another principle in the human mind, the principle of action or will; and of this the past has no hold, the future engrosses it entirely to itself. It is this strong lever of the affections that gives so powerful a bias to our sentiments on this subject, and violently transposes the natural order of our associations. We regret the pleasures we have lost, and eagerly anticipate those which are to come: we dwell with satisfaction on the evils from which we have escaped (*Posthac meminisse iuvabit*), and dread future pain. The good that is past is in this sense like money that is spent, which is of no further use, and about which we give ourselves little concern. The good we expect is like a store yet untouched, and in the enjoyment of which we promise ourselves infinite gratification. What has happened to us we think of no consequence: what is to happen to us, of the greatest. Why so? Simply because the one is still in our power, and the other not, because the efforts of the will to bring any object to pass or to prevent it strengthen our attachment or aversion to that object, because the pains and attention bestowed upon anything add to our interest in it, and because the habitual and earnest pursuit of any end redoubles the ardour of our expectations, and converts the speculative and indolent satisfaction we might otherwise feel in it into real passion. Our regrets, anxiety, and wishes are thrown away upon the past; but the insisting on the importance of the future is of the utmost use in aiding our resolutions and stimulating our exertions. If the future were no more amenable to our wills than the past; if our precautions, our sanguine schemes, our hopes and fears, were of as little avail in the one case as the other; if we could neither soften our minds to pleasure nor steel our fortitude to the resistance of pain beforehand; if all objects drifted along by us like straws or pieces of wood in a river, the will being purely passive, and as little able to avert the future as to arrest the past, we should in that case be equally indifferent to both; that is, we should consider each as they affected the thoughts and imagination with certain sentiments of approbation or regret, but without the importunity of action, the irritation of the will, throwing the whole weight of passion and prejudice into one scale, and

leaving the other quite empty. While the blow is coming we prepare to meet it, we think to ward off or break its force, we arm ourselves with patience to endure what cannot be avoided, we agitate ourselves with fifty needless alarms about it ; but when the blow is struck the pang is over, the struggle is no longer necessary, and we cease to harass or torment ourselves about it more than we can help. It is not that the one belongs to the future and the other to time past ; but that the one is a subject of action, of uneasy apprehension, of strong passion, and that the other has passed wholly out of the sphere of action into the region of

“Calm contemplation and majestic pains.”

It would not give a man more concern to know that he should be put to the rack a year hence than to recollect that he had been put to it a year ago, but that he hopes to avoid the one, whereas he must sit down patiently under the consciousness of the other. In this hope he wears himself out in vain struggles with fate, and puts himself to the rack of his imagination every day he has to live in the meanwhile. When the event is so remote or so independent of the will as to set aside the necessity of immediate action, or to baffle all attempts to defeat it, it gives us little more disturbance or emotion than if it had already taken place, or were something to happen in another state of being, or to an indifferent person. Criminals are observed to grow more anxious as their trial approaches ; but after their sentence is passed they become tolerably resigned, and generally sleep sound the night before its execution.

It in some measure confirms this theory, that men attach more or less importance to past and future events according as they are more or less engaged in action and the busy scenes of life. Those who have a fortune to make, or are in pursuit of rank and power, think little of the past, for it does not contribute greatly to their views : those who have nothing to do but to think take nearly the same interest in the past as in the future. The contemplation of the one is as delightful and real as that of the other. The season of hope has an end ; but the remembrance of it is left. The past still lives in the memory of those who have leisure to look back upon the way that they have trod, and can from it “catch glimpses that may make them less forlorn.” The turbulence of action and uneasiness of desire must point to the future : it is only in the quiet innocence of shepherds, in the simplicity of pastoral ages, that a tomb was found with this inscription, “*I ALSO WAS AN ARCADIAN !*”

Though I by no means think that our habitual attachment to life is in exact proportion to the value of the gift, yet I am not one

of those splenetic persons who affect to think it of no value at all. *Que peu de chose est la vie humaine !* is an exclamation in the mouths of moralists and philosophers, to which I cannot agree. It is little, it is short, it is not worth having, if we take the last hour, and leave out all that has gone before, which has been one way of looking at the subject. Such calculators seem to say that life is nothing when it is over, and that may, in their sense, be true. If the old rule, *Respice finem*, were to be made absolute, and no one could be pronounced fortunate till the day of his death, there are few among us whose existence would, upon those conditions, be much to be envied. But this is not a fair view of the case. A man's life is his whole life, not the last glimmering snuff of the candle ; and this, I say, is considerable, and not a *little matter*, whether we regard its pleasures or its pains. To draw a peevish conclusion to the contrary from our own superannuated desires or forgetful indifference is about as reasonable as to say a man never was young because he has grown old, or never lived because he is now dead. The length or agreeableness of a journey does not depend on the few last steps of it, nor is the size of a building to be judged of from the last stone that is added to it. It is neither the first nor last hour of our existence, but the space that parts these two—not our exit nor our entrance upon the stage, but what we do, feel, and think while there—that we are to attend to in pronouncing sentence upon it. Indeed, it would be easy to show that it is the very extent of human life, the infinite number of things contained in it, its contradictory and fluctuating interests, the transition from one situation to another, the hours, months, years spent in one fond pursuit after another ; that it is, in a word, the length of our common journey, and the quantity of events crowded into it, that, baffling the grasp of our actual perception, make it slide from our memory and dwindle into nothing in its own perspective. It is too mighty for us, and we say it is nothing ! It is a speck in our fancy, and yet what canvas would be big enough to hold its striking groups, its endless subjects ? It is light as vanity, and yet if all its weary moments, if all its head and heart aches were compressed into one, what fortitude would not be overwhelmed with the blow ! What a huge heap, a “huge, dumb heap,” of wishes, thoughts, feelings, anxious cares, soothing hopes, loves, joys, friendships, it is composed of ! How many ideas and trains of sentiment, long and deep and intense, often pass through the mind in only one day's thinking or reading, for instance ! How many such days are there in a year, how many years in a long life, still occupied with something interesting, still recalling some old im-

pression, still recurring to some difficult question and making progress in it, every step accompanied with a sense of power, and every moment conscious of "the high endeavour or the glad success;" for the mind seizes only on that which keeps it employed, and is wound up to a certain pitch of pleasurable excitement or lively solicitude, by the necessity of its own nature. . . .

The passions contract and warp the natural progress of life. They paralyse all of it that is not devoted to their tyranny and caprice. This makes the difference between the laughing innocence of childhood, the pleasantness of youth, and the crabbedness of age. A load of cares lies like a weight of guilt upon the mind; so that a man of business often has all the air, the distraction and restlessness and hurry of feeling of a criminal. A knowledge of the world takes away the freedom and simplicity of thought as effectually as the contagion of its example. The artlessness and candour of our early years are open to all impressions alike, because the mind is not clogged and preoccupied with other objects. Our pleasures and our pains come single, make room for one another, and the spring of the mind is fresh and unbroken, its aspect clear and unsullied. Hence "the tear forgot as soon as shed, the sunshine of the breast." But as we advance farther the will gets greater head. We form violent antipathies and indulge exclusive preferences. We make up our minds to some one thing, and if we cannot have that, will have nothing. We are wedded to opinion, to fancy, to prejudice, which destroys the soundness of our judgments and the serenity and buoyancy of our feelings. The chain of habit coils itself round the heart, like a serpent, to gnaw and stifle it. It grows rigid and callous; and for the softness and elasticity of childhood, full of proud-flesh and obstinate tumours. The violence and perversity of our passions come in more and more to overlay our natural sensibility and well-grounded affections; and we screw ourselves up to aim only at those things which are neither desirable nor practicable. Thus life passes away in the feverish irritation of pursuit and the certainty of disappointment. By degrees, nothing but this morbid state of feeling satisfies us; and all common pleasures and cheap amusements are sacrificed to the demon of ambition, avarice, or dissipation. The machine is overwrought: the parching heat of the veins dries up and withers the flowers of Love, Hope, and Joy; and any pause, any release from the rack of ecstasy on which we are stretched, seems more insupportable than the pangs which we endure. We are suspended between tormenting desires and the horrors of *ennui*. The impulse of the will, like the wheels of a carriage going downhill, becomes too strong for the

driver, Reason, and cannot be stopped nor kept within bounds. Some idea, some fancy, takes possession of the brain; and however ridiculous, however distressing, however ruinous, haunts us by a sort of fascination through life.

Not only is this principle of excessive irritability to be seen at work in our more turbulent passions and pursuits, but even in the formal study of arts and sciences the same thing takes place, and undermines the repose and happiness of life. The eagerness of pursuit overcomes the satisfaction to result from the accomplishment. The mind is overstrained to attain its purpose; and when it is attained, the ease and alacrity necessary to enjoy it are gone. The irritation of action does not cease and go down with the occasion for it; but we are first uneasy to get to the end of our work, and then uneasy for want of something to do. The ferment of the brain does not of itself subside into pleasure and soft repose. Hence the disposition to strong stimuli observable in persons of much intellectual exertion to allay and carry off the overexcitement. The *improvisatori* poets (it is recorded by Spence in his "Anecdotes of Pope") cannot sleep after an evening's continued display of their singular and difficult art. The rhymes keep running in their head in spite of themselves, and will not let them rest. Mechanics and labouring people never know what to do with themselves on a Sunday, though they return to their work with greater strength for the relief, and look forward to it with pleasure all the week. Sir Joshua Reynolds was never comfortable out of his painting-room, and died of chagrin and regret because he could not paint on to the last moment of his life. He used to say that he could go on retouching a picture for ever, as long as it stood on his easel; but as soon as it was once fairly out of the house he never wished to see it again. An ingenious artist of our own time has been heard to declare, that if ever the devil got him into his clutches he would set him to copy his own pictures. Thus the secure, self-complacent retrospect to what is done is nothing, while the anxious, uneasy looking forward to what is to come is everything. We are afraid to dwell upon the past, lest it should retard our future progress; the indulgence of ease is fatal to excellence; and to succeed in life we lose the ends of being.



## CAPACITY AND GENIUS.

[From the article "On Genius and Common-Sense."]

CAPACITY is not the same thing as genius. Capacity may be described to relate to the quantity of knowledge, however acquired,—genius to its quality and the mode of acquiring it. Capacity is power over given ideas or combinations of ideas; genius is the power over those which are not given, and for which no obvious or precise rule can be laid down. Or capacity is power of any sort; genius is power of a different sort from what has yet been shown. A retentive memory, a clear understanding, is capacity, but it is not genius. The Admirable Crichton was a person of prodigious capacity, but there is no proof (that I know) that he had an atom of genius. His verses that remain are dull and sterile. He could learn all that was known of any subject: he could do anything if others could show him the way to do it. This was very wonderful; but that is all you can say of it. It requires a good capacity to play well at chess; but, after all, it is a game of skill, and not of genius. Know what you will of it, the understanding still moves in certain tracks in which others have trod it before, quicker or slower, with more or less comprehension and presence of mind. The greatest skill strikes out nothing for itself, from its own peculiar resources; the nature of the game is a thing determinate and fixed: there is no royal or poetical road to checkmate your adversary. There is no place for genius but in the indefinite and unknown. The discovery of the binomial theorem was an effort of genius; but there was none shown in Jedediah Buxton's being able to multiply nine figures by nine in his head. If he could have multiplied ninety figures by ninety instead of nine, it would have been equally useless toil and trouble. He is a man of capacity who possesses considerable intellectual riches: he is a man of genius who finds out a vein of new ore. Originality is the seeing nature differently from others, and yet as it is in itself. It is not singularity or affectation, but the discovery of new and valuable truth. All the world do not see the whole meaning of any object they have been looking at. Habit blinds them to some things: short-sightedness to others. Every mind is not a gauge and measure of truth. Nature has her surface and her dark recesses. She is deep, obscure, and infinite. It is only minds on whom she makes her fullest impressions that can penetrate her shrine or unveil her *Holy of Holies*. It is only those whom she has filled with her spirit that have the boldness or the power to reveal

her mysteries to others. But nature has a thousand aspects, and one man can only draw out one of them. Whoever does this is a man of genius. One displays her force, another her refinement; one her power of harmony, another her suddenness of contrast; one her beauty of form, another her splendour of colour. Each does that for which he is best fitted by his particular genius; that is to say, by some quality of mind into which the quality of the object sinks deepest where it finds the most cordial welcome, is perceived to its utmost extent, and where again it forces its way out from the fulness with which it has taken possession of the mind of the student. The imagination gives out what it has first absorbed by congeniality of temperament, what it has attracted and moulded into itself by elective affinity, as the loadstone draws and impregnates iron. A little originality is more esteemed and sought for than the greatest acquired talent, because it throws a new light upon things and is peculiar to the individual. The other is common, and may be had for the asking, to any amount.

The value of any work is to be judged of by the quantity of originality contained in it. A very little of this will go a great way. If Goldsmith had never written anything but the two or three first chapters of the "Vicar of Wakefield" or the character of a Village Schoolmaster, they would have stamped him a man of genius. The editors of Encyclopædias are not usually reckoned the first literary characters of the age. The works of which they have the management contain a great deal of knowledge, like chests or warehouses, but the goods are not their own. We should as soon think of admiring the shelves of a library; but the shelves of a library are useful and respectable. I was once applied to, in a delicate emergency, to write an article on a difficult subject for an Encyclopædia, and was advised to take time and give it a systematic and scientific form, to avail myself of all the knowledge that was to be obtained on the subject, and arrange it with clearness and method. I made answer that, as to the first, I had taken time to do all that I ever pretended to do, as I had thought incessantly on different matters for twenty years of my life; that I had no particular knowledge of the subject in question, and no head for arrangement; and that the utmost I could do in such a case would be, when a systematic and scientific article was prepared, to write marginal notes upon it, to insert a remark or illustration of my own (not to be found in former Encyclopædias) or to suggest a better definition than had been offered in the text. There are two sorts of writing. The first is compilation, and consists in collecting and stating all that is already known of any question in the best possible manner, for the benefit of the un-

informed reader. An author of this class is a very learned amanuensis of other people's thoughts. The second sort proceeds on an entirely different principle. Instead of bringing down the account of knowledge to the point at which it has already arrived, it professes to start from that point on the strength of the writer's individual reflections; and supposing the reader in possession of what is already known, supplies deficiencies, fills up certain blanks, and quits the beaten road in search of new tracts of observation or sources of feeling. It is in vain to object to this last style that it is disjointed, disproportioned, and irregular. It is merely a set of additions and corrections to other men's works, or to the common stock of human knowledge, printed separately. You might as well expect a continued chain of reasoning in the notes to a book. It skips all the trite, intermediate, level commonplaces of the subject, and only stops at the difficult passages of the human mind, or touches on some striking point that has been overlooked in previous editions. A view of a subject, to be connected and regular, cannot be all new. A writer will always be liable to be charged either with paradox or commonplace, either with dulness or affectation. But we have no right to demand from any one more than he pretends to. There is indeed a medium in all things, but to unite opposite excellences is a task ordinarily too hard for mortality. He who succeeds in what he aims at, or who takes the lead in any one mode or path of excellence, may think himself very well off. It would not be fair to complain of the style of an Encyclopædia as dull, as wanting volatile salt, nor of the style of an Essay because it is too light and sparkling, because it is not a *caput mortuum*. . . . I grant it best to unite solidity with show, general information with particular ingenuity. This is the pattern of a perfect style; but I myself do not pretend to be a perfect writer. In fine, we do not banish light French wines from our tables, or refuse to taste sparkling Champagne when we can get it because it has not the body of old port. Besides, I do not know that dulness is strength, or that an observation is slight because it is striking. Mediocrity, insipidity, want of character, is the great fault.

It is not, then, acuteness of organs or extent of capacity that constitutes rare genius or produces the most exquisite models of art, but an intense sympathy with some one beauty or distinguishing characteristic in nature. Irritability alone, or the interest taken in certain things, may supply the place of genius in weak and otherwise ordinary minds. As there are certain instruments fitted to perform certain kinds of labour, there are certain minds so framed as to produce certain *chef-d'œuvres* in art and literature, which is

surely the best use they can be put to. If a man had all sorts of instruments in his shop and wanted one, he would rather have that one than be supplied with a double set of all the others. If he had them twice over, he could only do what he can do as it is, whereas without that one he perhaps cannot finish any one work he has in hand. So if a man can do one thing better than anybody else, the value of this one thing is what he must stand or fall by, and his being able to do a hundred other things merely as *well* as anybody else would not alter the sentence or add to his respectability; on the contrary, his being able to do so many other things well would probably interfere with and encumber him in the execution of the only thing that others cannot do as well as he, and so far be a drawback and a disadvantage. More people, in fact, fail from a multiplicity of talents and pretensions than from an absolute poverty of resources. . . .

#### ON PEOPLE WITH ONE IDEA.

THERE are people who have but one idea; at least, if they have more they keep it a secret, for they never talk but of one subject. There is Major Cartwright: he has but one idea or subject of discourse, Parliamentary Reform. Now this a very good thing, a very good idea, and a very good subject to talk about; but why should it be the only one? To hear the worthy and gallant Major resume his favourite topic is like law-business, or a person who has a suit in Chancery going on. Nothing can be attended to, nothing can be talked of, but that. Now it is getting on, now again it is standing still; at one time the Master has promised to pass judgment by a certain day, at another he has put it off again and called for more papers, and both are equally reasons for speaking of it. Like the piece of packthread in the barrister's hands, he turns and twists it all ways, and cannot proceed a step without it. Some schoolboys cannot read but in their own book; and the man of one idea cannot converse out of his own subject. Conversation it is not; but a sort of recital of the preamble of a bill, or a collection of grave arguments for a man's being of opinion with himself. It would be well if there was anything of character, of eccentricity in all this; but that is not the case. It is a political homily personified, a walking commonplace we have to encounter and listen to. It is just as if a man was to insist on your hearing him go through the fifth chapter of the Book of Judges every time you meet, or like the story of the Cosmogony in the "Vicar of Wakefield." It is a tune played on a barrel-organ. It is a common vehicle of discourse into

which they get and are set down when they please, without any pains or trouble to themselves. Neither is it professional pedantry or trading quackery: it has no excuse. The man has no more to do with the question which he saddles on all his hearers than you have. This is what makes the matter hopeless. If a farmer talks to you about his pigs or his poultry, or a physician about his patients, or a lawyer about his briefs, or a merchant about stock, or an author about himself, you know how to account for this; it is a common infirmity; you have a laugh at his expense, and there is no more to be said. But here is a man who goes out of his way to be absurd, and is troublesome by a romantic effort of generosity. You cannot say to him, "All this may be interesting to you, but I have no concern in it:" you cannot put him off in that way. He retorts the Latin adage upon you, *Nihil humani a me alienum puto*. He has got possession of a subject which is of universal and paramount interest (not "a fee-grief, due to some single breast"), and on that plea may hold you by the button as long as he chooses. His delight is to harangue on what nowise regards himself: how, then, can you refuse to listen to what as little amuses you? Time and tide wait for no man. The business of the State admits of no delay. The question of Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments stands first on the order of the day—takes precedence in its own right of every other question. Any other topic, grave or gay, is looked upon in the light of impertinence, and sent to *Coventry*. Business is an interruption; pleasure a digression from it. It is the question before every company where the Major comes, which immediately resolves itself into a committee of the whole world upon it, is carried on by means of a perpetual virtual adjournment, and it is presumed that no other is entertained while this is pending—a determination which gives its persevering advocate a fair prospect of expatiating on it to his dying day. As Cicero says of study, it follows him into the country, it stays with him at home: it sits with him at breakfast, and goes out with him to dinner. It is like a part of his dress, of the costume of his person, without which he would be at a loss what to do. If he meets you in the street, he accosts you with it as a form of salutation: if you see him at his own house, it is supposed you come upon that. If you happen to remark, "It is a fine day, or the town is full," it is considered as a temporary compromise of the question; you are suspected of not going the whole length of the principle. As Sancho, when reprimanded for mentioning his homely favourite in the Duke's kitchen, defended himself by saying, "There I thought of Dapple, and there I spoke of him," so the true stickler for

Reform neglects no opportunity of introducing the subject wherever he is. Place its veteran champion under the frozen north, and he will celebrate sweet smiling Reform: place him under the midday Afric suns, and he will talk of nothing but Reform—Reform so sweetly smiling and so sweetly promising for the last forty years—

*"Dulce ridentem Lalagen,  
Dulce loquentem!"*

A topic of this sort of which the person himself may be considered as almost sole proprietor and patentee is an estate for life, free from all encumbrance of wit, thought, or study; you live upon it as a settled income; and others might as well think to eject you out of a capital freehold house and estate as think to drive you out of it into the wide world of common-sense and argument. Every man's house is his castle, and every man's commonplace is his stronghold, from which he looks out and smiles at the dust and heat of controversy, raised by a number of frivolous and vexatious questions—"Rings the world with the vain stir!" A cure for this and every other evil would be a Parliamentary Reform; and so we return in a perpetual circle to the point from which we set out. Is not this a species of sober madness more provoking than the real? Has not the theoretical enthusiast his mind as much warped, as much enslaved by one idea, as the acknowledged lunatic, only that the former has no lucid intervals? If you see a visionary of this class going along the street, you can tell as well what he is thinking of and will say next as the man that fancies himself a teapot or the Czar of Muscovy. The one is as inaccessible to reason as the other: if the one raves, the other dotes!

There are some who fancy the Corn Bill the root of all evil, and others who trace all the miseries of life to the practice of muffling up children in night-clothes when they sleep or travel. They will declaim by the hour together on the first, and argue themselves black in the face on the last. It is in vain that you give up the point. They persist in the debate, and begin again—"But don't you see—?" These sort of partial obliquities, as they are more entertaining and original, are also by their nature intermittent. They hold a man but for a season. He may have one a year or every two years; and though, while he is in the heat of any new discovery, he will let you hear of nothing else, he varies from himself, and is amusing undesignedly. He is not like the chimes at midnight.

People of the character here spoken of, that is, who tease you to death with some one idea, generally differ in their favourite notion

from the rest of the world ; and, indeed, it is the love of distinction which is mostly at the bottom of this peculiarity. Thus one person is remarkable for living on a vegetable diet, and never fails to entertain you all dinner-time with an invective against animal food. One of this self-denying class, who adds to the primitive simplicity of this sort of food the recommendation of having it in a raw state, lamenting the death of a patient whom he had augured to be in a good way as a convert to his system, at last accounted for his disappointment in a whisper—"But she ate meat privately, depend upon it." It is not pleasant, though it is what one submits to willingly from some people, to be asked, every time you meet, whether you have quite left off drinking wine, and to be complimented or condoled with on your looks according as you answer in the negative or affirmative. Abernethy thinks his pill an infallible cure for all disorders. A person once complaining to his physician that he thought his mode of treatment had not answered, he assured him it was the best in the world,—“and as a proof of it,” says he, “I have had one gentleman, a patient with your disorder, under the same regimen for the last sixteen years !”—I have known persons whose minds were entirely taken up at all times and on all occasions with such questions as the Abolition of the Slave-trade, the Restoration of the Jews, or the progress of Unitarianism. I myself at one period took a pretty strong turn to inveighing against the Doctrine of Divine Right, and am not yet cured of my prejudice on that subject. How many projectors have gone mad in good earnest from incessantly harping on one idea, the discovery of the philosopher’s stone, the finding out the longitude, or paying off the national debt ! The disorder at length comes to a fatal crisis ; but long before this, and while they were walking about and talking as usual, the derangement of the fancy, the loss of all voluntary power to control or alienate their ideas from the single subject that occupied them, was gradually taking place, and overturning the fabric of the understanding by wrenching it all on one side. Some persons have got a definition of the verb, others a system of shorthand, others a cure for typhus fever, others a method for preventing the counterfeiting of bank-notes, which they think the best possible, and indeed the only one. Others insist there have been only three great men in the world, leaving you to add a fourth. A man who has been in Germany will sometimes talk of no thing but what is German : a Scotchman always leads the discourse to his own country. Some descant on the Kantian philosophy. There is a conceited fellow about town who talks always and everywhere on this subject. He wears the Categories round his neck like a pearl-

chain: he plays off the names of the primary and transcendental qualities like rings on his fingers. He talks of the Kantian system while he dances; he talks of it while he dines, he talks of it to his children, to his apprentices, to his customers. He called on me to convince me of it, and said I was only prevented from becoming a complete convert by one or two prejudices. He knows no more about it than a pikestaff. Why, then, does he make so much ridiculous fuss about it? It is not that he has got this one idea in his head, but that he has got no other. A dunce may talk on the subject of the Kantian philosophy with great impunity: if he opened his lips on any other, he might be found out. A French lady who had married an Englishman who said little, excused him by saying, "He is always thinking of Locke and Newton." This is one way of passing muster by following in the suite of great names! —A friend of mine, whom I met one day in the street, accosted me with more than usual vivacity, and said, "Well, we're selling, we're selling!" I thought he meant a house. "No," he said; "haven't you seen the advertisement in the newspapers? I mean five-and-twenty copies of the Essay." This work, a comely, capacious quarto on the most abstruse metaphysics, had occupied his sole thoughts for several years, and he concluded that I must be thinking of what he was. . . .

Mr. Owen is a man remarkable for one idea. It is that of himself and the Lanark cotton-mills. He carries this idea backwards and forwards with him from Glasgow to London, without allowing anything for attrition, and expects to find it in the same state of purity and perfection in the latter place as at the former. He acquires a wonderful velocity and impenetrability in his undaunted transit. Resistance to him is vain while the whirling motion of the mail-coach remains in his head.

"Nor Alps nor Apennines can keep him out,  
Nor fortified redoubt."

He even got possession, in the suddenness of his onset, of the steam-engine of the *Times* newspaper, and struck off ten thousand woodcuts of the "Projected Villages," which afforded an ocular demonstration to all who saw them of the practicability of Mr. Owen's whole scheme. He comes into a room with one of these documents in his hand, with the air of a schoolmaster and a quack doctor mixed, asks very kindly how you do, and on hearing you are still in an indifferent state of health owing to bad digestion, instantly turns round and observes, that "all that will be remedied in his plan; that, indeed, he thinks too much attention has been paid to the mind,



and not enough to the body; that in his system, which he has now perfected, and which will shortly be generally adopted, he has provided effectually for both; that he has been long of opinion that the mind depends altogether on the physical organisation, and where the latter is neglected or disordered, the former must languish and want its due vigour; that exercise is therefore a part of his system, with full liberty to develop every faculty of mind and body; that two objections had been made to his 'New View of Society,' viz., its want of relaxation from labour and its want of variety; but the first of these, the too great restraint, he trusted he had already answered, for where the powers of mind and body were freely exercised and brought out, surely liberty must be allowed to exist in the highest degree; and as to the second, the monotony which would be produced by a regular and general plan of co-operation, he conceived he had proved in his 'New View' and 'Addresses to the Higher Classes;' that the co-operation he had recommended was necessarily conducive to the most extensive improvement of the ideas and faculties, and where this was the case, there must be the greatest possible variety instead of a want of it." And having said this, this expert and sweeping orator takes up his hat and walks downstairs after reading his lecture of truisms like a playbill or an apothecary's advertisement; and should you stop him at the door to say, by way of putting in a word in common, that Mr. Southey seems somewhat favourable to his plan in his late Letter to Mr. William Smith, he looks at you with a smile of pity at the futility of all opposition and the idleness of all encouragement. People who thus swell out some vapid scheme of their own into undue importance seem to me to labour under water in the head—to exhibit a huge hydrocephalus! They may be very worthy people for all that, but they are bad companions and very indifferent reasoners. . . .

I hate to be surfeited with anything, however sweet. I do not want to be always tied to the same question, as if there were no other in the world. I like a mind more Catholic.

"I love to talk with mariners  
That come from a far countree."

I am not for "a collusion" but "an exchange" of ideas. It is well to hear what other people have to say on a number of subjects. I do not wish to be always respiring the same confined atmosphere, but to vary the scene, and get a little relief and fresh air out of doors. Do all we can to shake it off, there is always enough pedantry, egotism, and self-conceit left lurking behind; we need

not seal ourselves up hermetically in these precious qualities; so as to think of nothing but our own wonderful discoveries, and hear nothing but the sound of our own voice. Scholars, like princes, may learn something by being *incognito*. Yet we see those who cannot go into a bookseller's shop, or bear to be five minutes in a stage-coach, without letting you know who they are. They carry their reputation about with them as the snail does its shell, and sit under its canopy, like the lady in the lobster. I cannot understand this at all. What is the use of a man's always revolving round his own little circle? He must, one should think, be tired of it himself, as well as tire other people. A well-known writer says with much boldness, both in the thought and expression, that "a Lord is imprisoned in the Bastille of a *name*, and cannot enlarge himself into man;" and I have known men of genius in the same predicament. Why must a man be for ever mouthing out his own poetry, comparing himself with Milton, passage by passage, and weighing every line in a balance of posthumous fame which he holds in his own hands? It argues a want of imagination as well as common-sense. Has he no ideas but what he has put into verse, or none in common with his hearers? Why should he think it the only scholar-like thing, the only "virtue extant," to see the merit of his writings, and that "men are brutes without them"? Why should he bear a grudge to all art, to all beauty, to all wisdom that does not spring from his own brain? Or why should he fondly imagine that there is but one fine thing in the world, namely, poetry, and that he is the only poet in it? It will never do. Poetry is a very fine thing; but there are other things besides it. Everything must have its turn. Does a wise man think to enlarge his comprehension by turning his eyes only on himself, or hope to conciliate the admiration of others by scouting, proscribing, and loathing all that they delight in? He must either have a disproportionate idea of himself, or be ignorant of the world in which he lives. It is quite enough to have one class of people born to think the universe made for them!—It seems also to argue a want of repose, of confidence, and firm faith in a man's real pretensions to be always dragging them forward into the foreground, as if the proverb held here, *Out of sight out of mind*. Does he, for instance, conceive that no one would ever think of his poetry unless he forced it upon them by repeating it himself? Does he believe all competition, all allowance of another's merit, fatal to him? Must he, like Moody in the "Country Girl," lock up the faculties of his admirers in ignorance of all other fine things, painting, music, the antique, lest they should play truant to him? Methinks such a proceeding implies no good

opinion of his own genius or their taste:—it is deficient in dignity and in decorum. Surely if any one is convinced of the reality of an acquisition, he can bear not to have it spoken of every minute. If he knows he has an undoubted superiority in any respect, he will not be uneasy because every one he meets is not in the secret, nor staggered by the report of rival excellence.

There are persons who, without being chargeable with the vice here spoken of, yet “stand accountant for as great a sin;” though not dull and monotonous, they are vivacious mannerists in their conversation and excessive egotists. Though they run over a thousand subjects in mere gaiety of heart, their delight still flows from one idea, namely, themselves. Open the book in what page you will, there is a frontispiece of themselves staring you in the face. They are a sort of *Jacks o’ the Green*, with a sprig of laurel, a little tinsel, and a little smut, but still playing antics and keeping in incessant motion, to attract attention and extort your pittance of approbation. Whether they talk of the town or the country, poetry or politics, it comes to much the same thing. If they talk to you of the town, its diversions, “its palaces, its ladies, and its streets,” they are the delight, the grace, and ornament of it. If they are describing the charms of the country, they give no account of any individual spot or object or source of pleasure but the circumstance of their being there. “With them conversing, we forget all place, all seasons, and their change.” They perhaps pluck a leaf or a flower, patronise it, and hand it you to admire, but select no one feature of beauty or grandeur to dispute the palm of perfection with their own persons. Their rural descriptions are mere landscape backgrounds with their own portraits in an engaging attitude in front. They are not observing or enjoying the scene, but doing the honours as masters of the ceremonies to nature, and arbiters of elegance to all humanity. If they tell a love-tale of enamoured princesses, it is plain they fancy themselves the hero of the piece. If they discuss poetry, their encomiums still turn on something genial and unsophisticated, meaning their own style; if they enter into politics, it is understood that a hint from them to the potentates of Europe is sufficient. In short, as a lover (talk of what you will) brings in his mistress at every turn, so these persons contrive to divert your attention to the same darling object—they are, in fact, in love with themselves, and, like lovers, should be left to keep their own company.

## THE INDIAN JUGGLERS.

Coming forward and seating himself on the ground in his white dress and turban, the chief of the Indian jugglers begins with tossing up two brass balls, which is what any of us could do, with keeping up four at the same time, which is what and concludes. Would do to save our lives, nor if we were to take our none of us could do it in. Is it, then, a trifling power we see at work, whole lives to something next to miraculous? It is the utmost stretch or is it not so, impity, which nothing but the bending the faculties of human mind, to it from the tenderest infancy with incessant, of body and mind,lication up to manhood can accomplish or make ever-anxious approach to. Man, thou art a wonderful animal, and even a slight approaching out! Thou canst do strange things, but thou thy ways past find little account!—To conceive of this effort of extra- turnest them to hand, distracts the imagination and makes admiration ordinary dexterity, costs nothing to the performer, any more than breathless. Yet mechanical deception with which he had nothing if it were a mere, and laugh at the astonishment of the spectators. to do but to wait hair's-breadth, of the smallest conceivable portion. A single error of, fatal: the precision of the movements must be of time, would be, with, their rapidity is like lightning. To catch like a mathematical time in less than a second of time, and deliver four balls in successive return with seeming consciousness to the them back so as to, them revolve round him at certain intervals, hand again; to make, air spheres; to make them chase one another like the planets in time, or shoot up like flowers or meteors; to throw like sparkles of fire, and twine them round his neck like ribbons them behind his back, to what appears an impossibility, and to do it or like serpents; to, face, the carelessness imaginable; to laugh at, with all the ease, the, ring mockeries; to follow them with his eye to play with the glit, them with its lambent fire, or as if he had as if he could fascinate, with the music on the stage—there only to see that they kept time, does not admire may be quite is something in all this which he, sure he never really admired anything in the whole course of his life. It is skill surmounting difficulty, and beauty triumphing over skill. It seems as if the difficulty once mastered naturally revolved itself into ease and grace, and, as if, to be overcome at all, it must be overcome without effort. The smallest awkwardness or want of pliancy or self-possession would stop the whole process. It is the work of witchcraft, and yet sport

for children. Some of the other feats are quite as curious and wonderful, such as the balancing the artificial tree and shooting a bird from each branch through a quill; though none of them have the elegance or facility of the keeping up of the brass balls. You are in pain for the result, and glad when the experiment is over; they are not accompanied with the same unmixed, uncheckered delight as the former; and I would not give much to be merely astonished without being pleased at the same time. As to the swallowing of the sword, the police ought to interfere to prevent it. When I saw the Indian juggler do the same things before, his feet were bare, and he had large rings on the toes, which kept turning round all the time of the performance, as if they moved of themselves. The hearing a speech in Parliament, drawn out or stammered out by the Honourable Member or the Noble Lord, the ringing the changes on their commonplaces, which any one could repeat after them as well as they, stirs me not a jot, shakes not my good opinion of myself; but the seeing the Indian jugglers does. It makes me ashamed of myself. I ask what there is that I can do as well as this? Nothing. What have I been doing all my life? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to show for all my labour and pains? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark, and not finding them? Is there no one thing in which I can challenge competition, that I can bring as an instance of exact perfection, in which others cannot find a flaw? The utmost I can pretend to is to write a description of what this fellow can do. I can write a book; so can many others who have not even learned to spell. What abortions are these Essays! What errors, what ill-pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions! How little is made out, and that little how ill! Yet they are the best I can do. I endeavour to recollect all I have ever observed or thought upon a subject, and to express it as nearly as I can. Instead of writing on four subjects at a time, it is as much as I can manage to keep the thread of one discourse clear and unentangled. I have also time on my hands to correct my opinions and polish my periods; but the one I cannot, and the other I will not do. I am fond of arguing; yet with a good deal of pains and practice it is often as much as I can do to beat my man, though he may be an indifferent hand. A common fencer would disarm his adversary in the twinkling of an eye, unless he were a professor like himself. A stroke of wit will sometimes produce this effect, but there is no such power or superiority in sense or reasoning. There is no complete mastery of execution to be

shown there; and you hardly know the professor from the impudent pretender or the mere clown. . . .

Further, what is meant by perfection in mechanical exercises is the performing certain feats to a uniform nicety, that is, in fact, undertaking no more than you can perform. You task yourself; the limit you fix is optional, and no more than human industry and skill can attain to; but you have no abstract, independent standard of difficulty or excellence (other than the extent of your own powers). Thus he who can keep up four brass balls does this to *perfection*; but he cannot keep up five at the same instant, and would fail every time he attempted it. That is, the mechanical performer undertakes to emulate himself, not to equal another. But the artist undertakes to imitate another, or to do what nature has done, and this, it appears, is more difficult, viz., to copy what she has set before us in the face of nature or "human face divine," entire and without a blemish, than to keep up four brass balls at the same instant; for the one is done by the power of human skill and industry, and the other never was nor will be. Upon the whole, therefore, I have more respect for Reynolds than I have for Richer; for, happen how it will, there have been more people in the world who could dance on a rope like the one than who could paint like Sir Joshua. The latter was but a bungler in his profession to the other, it is true; but then he had a harder taskmaster to obey, whose will was more wayward and obscure, and whose instructions it was more difficult to practise. You can put a child apprentice to a tumbler or rope-dancer with a comfortable prospect of success, if they are but sound of wind and limb; but you cannot do the same thing in painting. The odds are a million to one. You may make, indeed, as many Haydons and H——s as you put into that sort of machine, but not one Reynolds amongst them all, with his grace, his grandeur, his blandness of gusto, "in tones and gestures hit," unless you could make the man over again. To snatch this grace beyond the reach of art is, then, the height of art, where fine art begins, and where mechanical skill ends. The soft suffusion of the soul, the speechless breathing eloquence, the looks "commencing with the skies," the ever-shifting forms of an eternal principle, that which is seen but for a moment, but dwells in the heart always, and is only seized as it passes by strong and secret sympathy, must be taught by nature and genius, not by rules or study. It is suggested by feeling, not by laborious microscopic inspection; in seeking for it without, we lose the harmonious clue to it within; and in aiming to grasp the substance, we let the very spirit of art evaporate. In a word, the objects of fine art are not the objects

of sight but as these last are the objects of taste and imagination, that is, as they appeal to the sense of beauty, of pleasure, and of power in the human breast, and are explained by that finer sense, and revealed in their inner structure to the eye in return. Nature is also a language. Objects, like words, have a meaning; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language, which he can only do by knowing its application to a thousand other objects in a thousand other situations. Thus the eye is too blind a guide of itself to distinguish between the warm or cold tone of a deep-blue sky, but another sense acts as a monitor to it, and does not err. The colour of the leaves in autumn would be nothing without the feeling that accompanies it; but it is that feeling that stamps them on the canvas, faded, seared, blighted, shrinking from the winter's flaw, and makes the sight as true as touch

“And visions, as poetic eyes avow,  
Cling to each leaf and hang on every bough.”

The more ethereal, evanescent, more refined and sublime part of art is the seeing nature through the medium of sentiment and passion, as each object is a symbol of the affections and a link in the chain of our endless being. But the unravelling this mysterious web of thought and feeling is alone in the Muse's gift, namely, in the power of that trembling sensibility which is awake to every change and every modification of its ever-varying impressions, that

“Thrills in each nerve, and lives along the line.”

This power is indifferently called genius, imagination, feeling, taste; but the manner in which it acts upon the mind can neither be defined by abstract rules, as is the case in science, nor verified by continual unvarying experiments, as is the case in mechanical performances. The mechanical excellence of the Dutch painters in colouring and handling is that which comes the nearest in fine art to the perfection of certain manual exhibitions of skill. The truth of the effect and the facility with which it is produced are equally admirable. Up to a certain point, everything is faultless. The hand and eye have done their part. There is only a want of taste and genius. It is after we enter upon that enchanted ground that the human mind begins to droop and flag as in a strange road or in a thick mist, benighted and making little way with many attempts and many failures, and that the best of us only escape with half a triumph. The undefined and the imaginary are the regions that we must pass like Satan, difficult and doubtful, “half-flying, half on foot.” The object in sense is a positive thing, and execution comes with practice.

Cleverness is a certain *knack* or aptitude at doing certain things which depend more on a particular adroitness and off-hand readiness than on force or perseverance, such as making puns, making epigrams, making extempore verses, mimicking the company, mimicking a style, &c. Cleverness is either liveliness and smartness, or something answering to *sleight-of-hand*, like letting a glass fall sideways off a table, or else a trick, like knowing the secret spring of a watch. Accomplishments are certain external graces, which are to be learned from others, and which are easily displayed to the admiration of the beholder, viz., dancing, riding, fencing, music, and so on. These ornamental acquirements are only proper to those who are at ease in mind and fortune. I know an individual who, if he had been born to an estate of five thousand a year, would have been the most accomplished gentleman of the age. He would have been the delight and envy of the circle in which he moved—would have graced by his manners the liberality flowing from the openness of his heart, would have laughed with the women, have argued with the men, have said good things and written agreeable ones, have taken a hand at piquet or the lead at the harpsichord, and have set and sung his own verses—*nugæ canoræ*—with tenderness and spirit; a Rochester without the vice, a modern Surrey! As it is, all these capabilities of excellence stand in his way. He is too versatile for a professional man, not dull enough for a political drudge, too gay to be happy, too thoughtless to be rich. He wants the enthusiasm of the poet, the severity of the prose-writer, and the application of the man of business.—Talent is the capacity of doing anything that depends on application and industry, such as writing a criticism, making a speech, studying the law. Talent differs from genius, as voluntary differs from involuntary power. Ingenuity is genius in trifles, greatness is genius in undertakings of much pith and moment. A clever or ingenious man is one who can do anything well, whether it is worth doing or not; a great man is one who can do that which when done is of the highest importance. Themistocles said he could not play on the flute, but that he could make of a small city a great one. This gives one a pretty good idea of the distinction in question.

Greatness is great power, producing great effects. It is not enough that a man has great power in himself, he must show it to all the world in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid. He must fill up a certain idea in the public mind. I have no other notion of greatness than this twofold definition, great results springing from great inherent energy. The great in visible objects has relation to that which extends over space: the great in mental ones has to do



with space and time. No man is truly great who is great only in his life-time. The test of greatness is the page of history. Nothing can be said to be great that has a distinct limit, or that borders on something evidently greater than itself. Besides, what is short-lived and pampered into mere notoriety is of a gross and vulgar quality in itself. A Lord Mayor is hardly a great man. A city orator or patriot of the day only show, by reaching the height of their wishes, the distance they are at from any true ambition. Popularity is neither fame nor greatness. A king (as such) is not a great man. He has great power, but it is not his own. He merely wields the lever of the State, which a child, an idiot, or a madman can do. It is the office, not the man, we gaze at. Any one else in the same situation would be just as much an object of abject curiosity. We laugh at the country girl who, having seen a king, expressed her disappointment by saying, "Why, he is only a man!" Yet, knowing this, we run to see a king as if he was something more than a man. To display the greatest powers, unless they are applied to great purposes, makes nothing for the character of greatness. To throw a barleycorn through the eye of a needle, to multiply nine figures by nine in the memory, argues definite dexterity of body and capacity of mind, but nothing comes of either. There is a surprising power at work, but the effects are not proportionate, or such as take hold of the imagination. To impress the idea of power on others, they must be made in some way to feel it. It must be communicated to their understandings in the shape of an increase of knowledge, or it must subdue and overawe them by subjecting their wills. Admiration to be solid and lasting must be founded on proofs from which we have no means of escaping; it is neither a slight nor a voluntary gift. A mathematician who solves a profound problem, a poet who creates an image of beauty in the mind that was not there before, imparts knowledge and power to others, in which his greatness and his fame consists, and on which it reposes. Jedediah Buxton will be forgotten; but Napier's bones will live. Lawgivers, philosophers, founders of religion, conquerors and heroes, inventors and great geniuses in arts and sciences, are great men, for they are great public benefactors, or formidable scourges to mankind. Among ourselves, Shakspeare, Newton, Bacon, Milton, Cromwell, were great men, for they showed great power by acts and thoughts, which have not yet been consigned to oblivion. They must needs be men of lofty stature whose shadows lengthen out to remote posterity. A great farce-writer may be a great man; for Molière was but a great farce-writer. In my mind, the author of "*Don Quixote*" was a great man. So have there been

many others. A great chess-player is not a great man, for he leaves the world as he found it. No act terminating in itself constitutes greatness. This will apply to all displays of power or trials of skill, which are confined to the momentary, individual effort, and construct no permanent image or trophy of themselves without them. Is not an actor, then, a great man, because "he dies and leaves the world no copy"? I must make an exception for Mrs. Siddons, or else give up my definition of greatness for her sake. A man at the top of his profession is not therefore a great man. He is great in his way, but that is all, unless he shows the marks of a great moving intellect, so that we trace the master-mind, and can sympathise with the springs that urge him on. The rest is but a craft or *mystery*. John Hunter was a great man—that any one might see without the smallest skill in surgery. His style and manner showed the man. He would set about cutting up the carcass of a whale with the same greatness of gusto that Michael Angelo would have hewn a block of marble. Lord Nelson was a great naval commander; but for myself, I have not much opinion of a seafaring life. Sir Humphry Davy is a great chemist, but I am not sure that he is a great man. I am not a bit the wiser for any of his discoveries, nor I never met with any one that was. But it is in the nature of greatness to propagate an idea of itself, as wave impels wave, circle without circle. It is a contradiction in terms for a coxcomb to be a great man. A really great man has always an idea of something greater than himself. I have observed that certain sectaries and polemical writers have no higher compliment to pay their most shining lights than to say that "such a one was a considerable man in his day." Some new elucidation of a text sets aside the authority of the old interpretation, and a "great scholar's memory outlives him half-a-century," at the utmost. A rich man is not a great man, except to his dependents and his steward. A lord is a great man in the idea we have of his ancestry, and probably of himself, if we know nothing of him but his title. I have heard a story of two bishops, one of whom said (speaking of St. Peter's at Rome) that when he first entered it he was rather awe-struck, but that as he walked up it his mind seemed to swell and dilate with it and at last to fill the whole building: the other said, that as he saw more of it he appeared to himself to grow less and less every step he took, and in the end to dwindle into nothing. This was in some respects a striking picture of a great and little mind—for greatness sympathises with greatness, and littleness shrinks into itself. The one might have become a Wolsey; the other was only fit to become a Mendicant Friar—or there might

have been court-reasons for making him a bishop. The French have to me a character of littleness in all about them; but they have produced three great men that belong to every country, Molière, Rabelais, and Montaigne.

### JOHN CAVANAGH.

To return from this digression, and conclude the Essay. A singular instance of manual dexterity was shown in the person of the late John Cavanagh, whom I have several times seen. His death was celebrated at the time in an article in the *Examiner* newspaper (February 7, 1819), written apparently between jest and earnest; but as it is pat to our purpose, and falls in with my own way of considering such subjects, I shall here take leave to quote it:—

“Died at his house in Burbage Street, St. Giles’s, John Cavanagh, the famous hand fives-player. When a person dies who does any one thing better than any one else in the world, which so many others are trying to do well, it leaves a gap in society. It is not likely that any one will now see the game of fives played in its perfection for many years to come—for Cavanagh is dead, and has not left his peer behind him. It may be said that there are things of more importance than striking a ball against a wall—there are things, indeed, that make more noise and do as little good, such as making war and peace, making speeches and answering them, making verses and blotting them, making money and throwing it away. But the game of fives is what no one despises who has ever played at it. It is the finest exercise for the body, and the best relaxation for the mind. The Roman poet said that ‘Care mounted behind the horseman and stuck to his skirts.’ But this remark would not have applied to the fives-player. He who takes to playing at fives is twice young. He feels neither the past nor future ‘in the instant.’ Debts, taxes, ‘domestic treason, foreign levy, nothing can touch him further.’ He has no other wish, no other thought, from the moment the game begins, but that of striking the ball, of placing it, of *making* it! This Cavanagh was sure to do. Whenever he touched the ball there was an end of the chase. His eye was certain, his hand fatal, his presence of mind complete. He could do what he pleased, and he always knew exactly what to do. He saw the whole game, and played it; took instant advantage of his adversary’s weakness, and recovered balls, as if by a miracle and from sudden thought, that every one gave for lost. He had equal power and skill, quickness and judgment. He could either outwit his

antagonist by finesse, or beat him by main strength. Sometimes, when he seemed preparing to send the ball with the full swing of his arm, he would by a slight turn of his wrist drop it within an inch of the line. In general, the ball came from his hand, as if from a racket, in a straight horizontal line; so that it was in vain to attempt to overtake or stop it. As it was said of a great orator that he never was at a loss for a word, and for the properest word, so Cavanagh always could tell the degree of force necessary to be given to a ball, and the precise direction in which it should be sent. He did his work with the greatest ease, never took more pains than was necessary, and while others were fagging themselves to death, was as cool and collected as if he had just entered the court. His style of play was as remarkable as his power of execution. He had no affectation, no trifling. He did not throw away the game to show off an attitude or try an experiment. He was a fine, sensible, manly player, who did what he could, but that was more than any one else could even affect to do. His blows were not undecided and ineffectual—lumbering like Mr. Wordsworth's epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge's lyric prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham's speeches, nor wide of it like Mr. Canning's wit, nor foul like the *Quarterly*, nor *let* balls like the *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett and Junius together would have made a Cavanagh. He was the best *uphill* player in the world; even when his adversary was fourteen, he would play on the same or better, and as he never flung away the game through carelessness and conceit, he never gave it up through laziness or want of heart. The one peculiarity of his play was that he never *volleyed*, but let the balls hop; but if they rose an inch from the ground, he never missed having them. There was not only nobody equal, but nobody second to him. It is supposed that he could give any other player half the game, or beat them with his left hand. His service was tremendous. He once played Woodward and Meredith together (two of the best players in England) in the Fives-court, St. Martin's Street, and made seven-and-twenty aces following by services alone—a thing unheard of. He another time played Peru, who was considered a first-rate fives-player, a match of the best out of five games, and in the three first games, which of course decided the match, Peru got only one ace. Cavanagh was an Irishman by birth, and a house-painter by profession. He had once laid aside his working-dress, and walked up, in his smartest clothes, to the Rosemary Branch to have an afternoon's pleasure. A person accosted him, and asked him if he would have a game. So they agreed to play for half-a-crown a game and a bottle of cider. The first game began—it was seven, eight, ten,

thirteen, fourteen, all. Cavanagh won it. The next was the same. They played on, and each game was hardly contested. 'There,' said the unconscious fives-player, 'there was a stroke that Cavanagh could not take: I never played better in my life, and yet I can't win a game. I don't know how it is!' However, they played on, Cavanagh winning every game and the bystanders drinking the cider and laughing all the time. In the twelfth game, when Cavanagh was only four, and the stranger thirteen, a person came in and said, 'What! are you here, Cavanagh?' The words were no sooner pronounced than the astonished player let the ball drop from his hand, and saying, 'What! have I been breaking my heart all this time to beat Cavanagh?' refused to make another effort. 'And yet, I give you my word,' said Cavanagh, telling the story with some triumph, 'I played all the while with my clenched fist.'—He used frequently to play matches at Copenhagen House for wagers and dinners. The wall against which they play is the same that supports the kitchen chimney, and when the wall resounded louder than usual, the cooks exclaimed, 'Those are the Irishman's balls,' and the joints trembled on the spit!—Goldsmith consoled himself that there were places where he too was admired; and Cavanagh was the admiration of all the fives-courts where he ever played. Mr. Powell, when he played matches in the court in St. Martin's Street, used to fill his gallery at half-a-crown a head, with amateurs and admirers of talent in whatever department it is shown. He could not have shown himself in any ground in England but he would have been immediately surrounded with inquisitive gazers, trying to find out in what part of his frame his unrivalled skill lay. He was a young fellow of sense, humour, and courage. He once had a quarrel with a waterman at Hungerford Stairs, and, they say, served him out in great style. In a word, there are hundreds at this day who cannot mention his name without admiration, as the best fives-player that perhaps ever lived (the greatest excellence of which they have any notion); and the noisy shout of the ring happily stood him in stead of the unheard voice of posterity! The only person who seems to have excelled as much in another way as Cavanagh did in his was the late John Davies, the racket-player. It was remarked of him that he did not seem to follow the ball, but the ball seemed to follow him. Give him a foot of wall, and he was sure to make the ball. The four best racket-players of that day were Jack Spines, Jem Harding, Armitage, and Church. Davies could give any one of these two hands a time, that is, half the game, and each of these, at their best, could give the best player now in London the same odds. Such are the gradations in all

exertions of human skill and art. He once played four capital players together, and beat them. He was also a first-rate tennis-player and an excellent fives-player. In the Fleet or King's Bench he would have stood against Powell, who was reckoned the best open-ground player of his time. This last-mentioned player is at present the keeper of the Fives-court, and we might recommend to him for a motto over his door—'Who enters here forgets himself, his country, and his friends.' And the best of it is, that by the calculation of the odds, none of the three are worth remembering!—Cavanagh died from the bursting of a blood-vessel, which prevented him from playing for the last two or three years. This, he was often heard to say, he thought hard upon him. He was fast recovering, however, when he was suddenly carried off, to the regret of all who knew him. As Mr. Peel made it a qualification of the present Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton, that he was an excellent moral character, so Jack Cavanagh was a zealous Catholic, and could not be persuaded to eat meat on a Friday, the day on which he died. We have paid this willing tribute to his memory.

'Let no rude hand deface it,  
And his forlorn "*Hic Jacet.*"'"

### ON LIVING TO ONE'S SELF.

"Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,  
Or by the lazy Scheldt or wandering Po."

I NEVER was in a better place or humour than I am at present for writing on this subject. I have a partridge getting ready for my supper, my fire is blazing on the hearth, the air is mild for the season of the year, I have had but a slight fit of indigestion to-day (the only thing that makes me abhor myself), I have three hours good before me, and therefore I will attempt it. It is as well to do it at once as to have it to do for a week to come.

If the writing on this subject is no easy task, the thing itself is a harder one. It asks a troublesome effort to ensure the admiration of others: it is a still greater one to be satisfied with one's own thoughts. As I look from the window at the wide bare heath before me, and through the misty moonlight air see the woods that wave over the top of Winterslow,

"While heav'n's chancel-vault is blind with sleet,"

my mind takes its flight through too long a series of years, supported

only by the patience of thought and secret yearnings after truth and good, for me to be at a loss to understand the feeling I intend to write about; but I do not know that this will enable me to convey it more agreeably to the reader. . . .

What I mean by living to one's self is living in the world, as in it, not of it; it is as if no one knew there was such a person, and you wished no one to know it; it is to be a silent spectator of the mighty scene of things, not an object of attention or curiosity in it; to take a thoughtful, anxious interest in what is passing in the world, but not to feel the slightest inclination to make or meddle with it. It is such a life as a pure spirit might be supposed to lead, and such an interest as it might take in the affairs of men, calm, contemplative, passive, distant, touched with pity for their sorrows, smiling at their follies without bitterness, sharing their affections, but not troubled by their passions, not seeking their notice, nor once dreamt of by them. He who lives wisely to himself and to his own heart looks at the busy world through the loopholes of retreat, and does not want to mingle in the fray. "He hears the tumult, and is still." He is not able to mend it, nor willing to mar it. He sees enough in the universe to interest him without putting himself forward to try what he can do to fix the eyes of the universe upon him. Vain the attempt! He reads the clouds, he looks at the stars, he watches the return of the seasons, the falling leaves of autumn, the perfumed breath of spring, starts with delight at the note of a thrush in a copse near him, sits by the fire, listens to the moaning of the wind, pores upon a book, or discourses the freezing hours away, or melts down hours to minutes in pleasing thought. All this while he is taken up with other things, forgetting himself. He relishes an author's style without thinking of turning author. He is fond of looking at a print from an old picture in the room, without teasing himself to copy it. He does not fret himself to death with trying to be what he is not, or to do what he cannot. He hardly knows what he is capable of, and is not in the least concerned whether he shall ever make a figure in the world. He feels the truth of the lines—

"The man whose eye is ever on himself  
Doth look one, the least of nature's works;  
One who might move the wise man to that scorn  
Which wisdom holds unlawful ever."

He looks out of himself at the wide-extended prospect of nature, and takes an interest beyond his narrow pretensions in general humanity. He is free as air, and independent as the wind. Woe

be to him when he first begins to think what others say of him. While a man is contented with himself and his own resources, all is well. When he undertakes to play a part on the stage, and to persuade the world to think more about him than they do about themselves, he is got into a track where he will find nothing but briars and thorns, vexation and disappointment. I can speak a little to this point. For many years of my life I did nothing but think. I had nothing else to do but solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky, or wander by the pebbled sea-side :

"To see the children sporting on the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

I cared for nothing, I wanted nothing. I took my time to consider whatever occurred to me, and was in no hurry to give a sophistical answer to a question—there was no printer's devil waiting for me. I used to write a page or two perhaps in half a year, and remember laughing heartily at the celebrated experimentalist, Nicholson, who told me that in twenty years he had written as much as would make three hundred octavo volumes. If I was not a great author, I could read with ever-fresh delight, "never ending, still beginning," and had no occasion to write a criticism when I had done. If I could not paint like Claude, I could admire "the witchery of the soft blue sky" as I walked out, and was satisfied with the pleasure it gave me. If I was dull, it gave me little concern : if I was lively, I indulged my spirits. I wished well to the world, and believed as favourably of it as I could. I was like a stranger in a foreign land, at which I looked with wonder, curiosity, and delight, without expecting to be an object of attention in return. I had no relations to the State, no duty to perform, no ties to bind me to others : I had neither friend nor mistress, wife nor child. I lived in a world of contemplation, and not of action.

This sort of dreaming existence is the best. He who quits it to go in search of realities generally barter repose for repeated disappointments and vain regrets. His time, thoughts, and feelings are no longer at his own disposal. From that instant he does not survey the objects of nature as they are in themselves, but looks askant at them to see whether he cannot make them the instruments of his ambition, interest, or pleasure ; for a candid, undesigning, undisguised simplicity of character, his views become jaundiced, sinister, and double : he takes no further interest in the great changes of the world but as he has a paltry share in producing them : instead of opening his senses, his understanding, and his



heart to the resplendent fabric of the universe, he holds a crooked mirror before his face, in which he may admire his own person and pretensions, and just glance his eye aside to see whether others are not admiring him too. He no more exists in the impression which "the fair variety of things" makes upon him, softened and subdued by habitual contemplation, but in the feverish sense of his own upstart self-importance. By aiming to fix, he is become the slave of opinion. He is a tool, a part of a machine that never stands still, and is sick and giddy with the ceaseless motion. He has no satisfaction but in the reflection of his own image in the public gaze—but in the repetition of his own name in the public ear. He himself is mixed up with and spoils everything. . . .

I have seen a celebrated talker of our own time turn pale and go out of the room when a showy-looking girl has come into it, who for a moment divided the attention of his hearers. Infinite are the mortifications of the bare attempt to emerge from obscurity; numberless the failures; and greater and more galling still the vicissitudes and tormenting accompaniments of success:

—"Whose top to climb  
Is certain falling, or so slippery, that  
The fear's as bad as falling."

"Would to God," exclaimed Oliver Cromwell, when he was at any time thwarted by the Parliament, "that I had remained by my woodside to tend a flock of sheep, rather than have been thrust on such a government as this!" When Buonaparte got into his carriage to proceed on his Russian expedition, carelessly twirling his glove and singing the air, "Malbrook to the war is going," he did not think of the tumble he has got since, the shock of which no one could have stood but himself. We see and hear chiefly of the favourites of Fortune and the Muse, of great generals, of first-rate actors, of celebrated poets. These are at the head; we are struck with the glittering eminence on which they stand, and long to set out on the same tempting career,—not thinking how many discontented half-pay lieutenants are in vain seeking promotion all their lives, and obliged to put up with "the insolence of office, and the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes;" how many half-starved strolling-players, are doomed to penury and tattered robes in country places, dreaming to the last of a London engagement; how many wretched daubers shiver and shake in the ague-fit of alternate hopes and fears, waste and pine away in the atrophy of genius, or else turn drawing-masters, picture-cleaners, or newspaper critics; how many hapless poets have sighed out their souls to the

Muse in vain, without ever getting their effusions further known than the Poet's Corner of a country newspaper, and looked and looked with grudging, wistful eyes at the envious horizon that bounded their provincial fame!—Suppose an actor, for instance, “after the heart-aches and the thousand natural pangs that flesh is heir to,” *does* get at the top of his profession, he can no longer bear a rival near the throne; to be second, or only equal to another, is to be nothing: he starts at the prospect of a successor, and retains the mimic sceptre with a convulsive grasp: perhaps, as he is about to seize the first place which he has long had in his eye, an unsuspected competitor steps in before him and carries off the prize, leaving him to commence his irksome toil again. He is in a state of alarm at every appearance or rumour of the appearance of a new actor: “a mouse that takes up its lodgings in a cat's ear” has a mansion of peace to him: he dreads every hint of an objection, and least of all can forgive praise mingled with censure: to doubt is to insult; to discriminate is to degrade: he dare hardly look into a criticism unless some one has *tasted* it for him, to see that there is no offence in it: if he does not draw crowded houses every night, he can neither eat nor sleep; or if all these terrible inflictions are removed, and he can “eat his meal in peace,” he then becomes surfeited with applause and dissatisfied with his profession: he wants to be something else, to be distinguished as an author, a collector, a classical scholar, a man of sense and information, and weighs every word he utters, and half-retracts it before he utters it, lest if he were to make the smallest slip of the tongue, it should get buzzed abroad that *Mr.* — *was only clever as an actor!* If ever there was a man who did not derive more pain than pleasure from his vanity, that man, says Rousseau, was no other than a fool. . . .

Even in the common affairs of life, in love, friendship, and marriage, how little security have we when we trust our happiness in the hands of others! Most of the friends I have seen have turned out the bitterest enemies or cold, uncomfortable acquaintance. Old companions are like meats served up too often, that lose their relish and their wholesomeness. He who looks at beauty to admire, to adore it, who reads of its wondrous power in novels, in poems, or in plays, is not unwise; but let no man fall in love, for from that moment he is “the baby of a girl.” I like very well to repeat such lines as these in the play of “*Mirandola* : ”

—“With what a waving air she goes  
Along the corridor! How like a fawn!  
Yet statelier. Hark! No sound, however soft.

Nor gentlest echo telleth when she treads,  
But every motion of her shape doth seem  
Hallowed by silence."

How few out of the infinite number of those that marry and are given in marriage wed with those they would prefer to all the world! Nay, how far the greater proportion are joined together by mere motives of convenience, accident, recommendation of friends, or indeed not infrequently by the very fear of the event, by repugnance and a sort of fatal fascination! Yet the tie is for life, not to be shaken off but with disgrace or death: a man no longer lives to himself, but is a body (as well as mind) chained to another, in spite of himself:

"Like life and death in disproportion met."

If love at first sight were mutual, or to be conciliated by kind offices; if the fondest affection were not so often repaid and chilled by indifference and scorn; if so many lovers, both before and since the madman in "*Don Quixote*," had not "worshipped a statue, hunted the wind, cried aloud to the desert;" if friendship were lasting; if merit were renown, and renown were health, riches, and long life; or if the homage of the world were paid to conscious worth and the true aspirations after excellence, instead of its gaudy signs and outward trappings; then, indeed, I might be of opinion that it is better to live to others than one's self; but as the case stands, I incline to the negative side of the question.

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me;  
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bow'd  
To its idolatries a patient knee—  
Nor coin'd my cheek to smiles—nor cried aloud  
In worship of an echo; in the crowd  
They could not deem me one of such; I stood  
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud  
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,  
Had I not filled my mind which thus itself subdued.

I have not loved the world, nor the world me—  
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,  
Though I have found them not, that there may be  
Words which are things—hopes which will not deceive,  
And virtues which are merciful nor weave  
Snares for the failing: I would also deem  
O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve;  
That two, or one, are almost what they seem—  
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream."

Sweet verse embalms the spirit of sour misanthropy; but woe

betide the ignoble prose-writer who should thus dare to compare notes with the world, or tax it roundly with imposture.

If I had sufficient provocation to rail at the public, as Ben Jonson did at the audience in the Prologues to his plays, I think I should do it in good set terms, nearly as follows :—There is not a more mean, stupid, dastardly, pitiful, selfish, spiteful, envious, ungrateful animal than the Public. It is the greatest of cowards, for it is afraid of itself. From its unwieldy, overgrown dimensions, it dreads the least opposition to it, and shakes like isinglass at the touch of a finger. It starts at its own shadow, like the man in the Hartz mountains, and trembles at the mention of its own name. It has a lion's mouth, the heart of a hare, with ears erect and sleepless eyes. It stands "listening its fears." It is so in awe of its own opinion, that it never dares to form any, but catches up the first idle rumour, lest it should be behindhand in its judgment, and echoes it till it is deafened with the sound of its own voice. The idea of what the public will think prevents the public from ever thinking at all, and acts as a spell on the exercise of private judgment; so that, in short, the public ear is at the mercy of the first impudent pretender who chooses to fill it with noisy assertions, or false surmises, or secret whispers. What is said by one is heard by all; the supposition that a thing is known to all the world makes all the world believe it, and the hollow repetition of a vague report drowns the "still, small voice" of reason. We may believe or know that what is said is not true; but we know or fancy that others believe it—we dare not contradict or are too indolent to dispute with them, and therefore give up our internal, and, as we think, our solitary conviction to a sound without substance, without proof, and often without meaning. Nay, more; we may believe and know not only that a thing is false, but that others believe and know it to be so, that they are quite as much in the secret of the imposture as we are, that they see the puppets at work, the nature of the machinery, and yet if any one has the art or power to get the management of it, he shall keep possession of the public ear by virtue of a cant phrase or nickname, and by dint of effrontery and perseverance make all the world believe and repeat what all the world know to be false. The ear is quicker than the judgment. We know that certain things are said; by that circumstance alone we know that they produce a certain effect on the imagination of others, and we conform to their prejudices by mechanical sympathy, and for want of sufficient spirit to differ with them. So far, then, is public opinion from resting on a broad and solid basis, as the aggregate of thought and feeling in a community, that it is slight

and shallow and variable to the last degree—the bubble of the moment; so that we may safely say the public is the dupe of public opinion, not its parent. The public is pusillanimous and cowardly, because it is weak. It knows itself to be a great dunce, and that it has no opinions but upon suggestion. Yet it is unwilling to appear in leading-strings, and would have it thought that its decisions are as wise as they are weighty. It is hasty in taking up its favourites, more hasty in laying them aside, lest it should be supposed deficient in sagacity in either case. It is generally divided into two strong parties, each of which will allow neither common-sense nor common honesty to the other side. It reads the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, and believes them both—or if there is a doubt, malice turns the scale. Taylor and Hessey told me that they had sold nearly two editions of the “*Characters of Shakspeare’s Plays*” in about three months, but that after the *Quarterly* review of them came out they never sold another copy. The public, enlightened as they are, must have known the meaning of that attack as well as those who made it. It was not ignorance then, but cowardice, that led them to give up their own opinion. A crew of mischievous critics at Edinburgh having affixed the epithet of the *Cockney School* to one or two writers born in the metropolis, all the people in London became afraid of looking into their works, lest they too should be convicted of cockneyism. Oh, brave public! . . .

The public is as envious and ungrateful as it is ignorant, stupid, and pigeon-livered :

“ A huge-sized monster of ingratitude.”

It reads, it admires, it extols, only because it is the fashion, not from any love of the subject or the man. It cries you up or runs you down out of mere caprice and levity. If you have pleased it, it is jealous of its own involuntary acknowledgment of merit, and seizes the first opportunity, the first shabby pretext, to pick a quarrel with you and be quits once more. Every petty caviller is erected into a judge, every tale-bearer is implicitly believed. Every little low paltry creature that gaped and wondered only because others did so is glad to find you (as he thinks) on a level with himself. An author is not then, after all, a being of another order. Public admiration is forced, and goes against the grain. Public obloquy is cordial and sincere: every individual feels his own importance in it. They give you up bound hand and foot into the power of your accusers. To attempt to defend yourself is a high crime and misdemeanour, a contempt of court, an extreme piece of

impertinence. Or if you prove every charge unfounded, they never think of retracing their error or making you amends. It would be a compromise of their dignity; they consider themselves as the party injured, and resent your innocence as an imputation on their judgment. The celebrated Bub Doddington, when out of favour at Court, said "he would not *justify* before his sovereign: it was for Majesty to be displeased, and for him to believe himself in the wrong!" The public are not quite so modest. People already begin to talk of the Scotch Novels as overrated. How, then, can common authors be supposed to keep their heads long above water? As a general rule, all those who live by the public starve, and are made a by-word and a standing jest into the bargain. Posterity is no better (not a bit more enlightened or more liberal), except that you are no longer in their power, and that the voice of common fame saves them the trouble of deciding on your claims. The public now are the posterity of Milton and Shakspeare. Our posterity will be the living public of a future generation. When a man is dead they put money in his coffin, erect monuments to his memory, and celebrate the anniversary of his birthday in set speeches. Would they take any notice of him if he were living? No!—I was complaining of this to a Scotchman who had been attending a dinner and a subscription to raise a monument to Burns. He replied he would sooner subscribe twenty pounds to his monument than have given it him while living; so that if the poet were to come to life again, he would treat him just as he was treated in fact. This was an honest Scotchman. What *he* said, the rest would do.

Enough: my soul, turn from them, and let me try to regain the obscurity and quiet that I love, "far from the madding strife," in some sequestered corner of my own, or in some far-distant land! In the latter case, I might carry with me as a consolation the passage in Bolingbroke's "Reflections on Exile" in which he describes in glowing colours the resources which a man may always find within himself, and of which the world cannot deprive him:—

"Believe me, the providence of God has established such an order in the world, that of all which belongs to us, the least valuable parts can alone fall under the will of others. Whatever is best is safest; lies out of the reach of human power; can neither be given nor taken away. Such is this great and beautiful work of nature, the world. Such is the mind of man, which contemplates and admires the world whereof it makes the noblest part. These are inseparably ours, and as long as we remain in one, we shall enjoy the other. Let us march, therefore, intrepidly wherever we are led by the course of human accidents. Wherever they lead us, on what

coast soever we are thrown by them, we shall not find ourselves absolutely strangers. We shall feel the same revolution of seasons, and the same sun and moon will guide the course of our year. The same azure vault, bespangled with stars, will be everywhere spread over our heads. There is no part of the world from whence we may not admire those planets which roll, like ours, in different orbits round the same central sun; from whence we may not discover an object still more stupendous, that army of fixed stars hung up in the immense space of the universe, innumerable suns whose beams enlighten and cherish the unknown world which roll around them; and whilst I am ravished by such contemplations as these, whilst my soul is thus raised up to heaven, it imports me little what ground I tread upon." . . .

#### ON THOUGHT AND ACTION.

. . . IF there is a propensity in the vulgar to admire the achievements of personal prowess or instances of fortunate enterprise too much, it cannot be denied that those who have to weigh out and dispense the meed of fame in books have been too much disposed, by a natural bias, to confine all merit and talent to the productions of the pen, or at least to those works which, being artificial or abstract representations of things, are transmitted to posterity and cried up as models in their kind. This, though unavoidable, is hardly just. Actions pass away and are forgotten, or are only discernible in their effects: conquerors, statesmen, and kings live but by their names stamped on the page of history. Hume says rightly that more people think about Virgil and Homer (and that continually) than ever trouble their heads about Cæsar or Alexander. In fact, poets are a longer-lived race than heroes: they breathe more of the air of immortality. They survive more entire in their thoughts and acts. We have all that Virgil or Homer did, as much as if we had lived at the same time with them: we can hold their works in our hands, or lay them on our pillows, or put them to our lips. Scarcely a trace of what the others did is left upon the earth, so as to be visible to common eyes. The one, the dead authors, are living men, still breathing and moving in their writings; the others, the conquerors of the world, are but the ashes in an urn. The sympathy (so to speak) between thought and thought is more intimate and vital than that between thought and action. Thought is linked to thought as flame kindles into flame: the tribute of admiration to the manes of departed heroism is like burning incense in a marble

monument. Words, ideas, feelings, with the progress of time harden into substances: things, bodies, actions, moulder away or melt into a sound, into thin air!—Yet though the Schoolmen in the Middle Ages disputed more about the texts of Aristotle than the battle of Arbela, perhaps Alexander's generals in his lifetime admired his pupil as much and liked him better. For not only a man's actions are effaced and vanish with him; his virtues and generous qualities die with him also:—his intellect only is immortal and bequeathed unimpaired to posterity. Words are the only things that last for ever. . . .

### ON VULGARITY AND AFFECTATION.

Few subjects are more nearly allied than these two—vulgarity and affectation. It may be said of them truly that “thin partitions do their bounds divide.” There cannot be a surer proof of a low origin or of an innate meanness of disposition than to be always talking and thinking of being genteel. One must feel a strong tendency to that which one is always trying to avoid; whenever we pretend, on all occasions, a mighty contempt for anything, it is a pretty clear sign that we feel ourselves very nearly on a level with it. Of the two classes of people, I hardly know which is to be regarded with most distaste, the vulgar aping the genteel, or the genteel constantly sneering at and endeavouring to distinguish themselves from the vulgar. These two sets of persons are always thinking of one another; the lower of the higher with envy, the more fortunate of their less happy neighbours with contempt. They are habitually placed in opposition to each other; jostle in their pretensions at every turn; and the same objects and train of thought (only reversed by the relative situation of either party) occupy their whole time and attention. The one are straining every nerve and out-raging common-sense, to be thought genteel; the others have no other object or idea in their heads than not to be thought vulgar. This is but poor spite, a very pitiful style of ambition. To be merely not that which one heartily despises is a very humble claim to superiority; to despise what one really is, is still worse.

Gentility is only a more select and artificial kind of vulgarity. It cannot exist but by a sort of borrowed distinction. It plumes itself up and revels in the homely pretensions of the mass of mankind. It judges of the worth of everything by name, fashion, and opinion; and hence, from the conscious absence of real qualities or sincere satisfaction in itself, it builds its supercilious and fantastic



conceit on the wretchedness and wants of others. Violent antipathies are always suspicious, and betray a secret affinity. The difference between the "Great Vulgar and the Small" is mostly in outward circumstances. The coxcomb criticises the dress of the clown, as the pedant cavils at the bad grammar of the illiterate, or the prude is shocked at the backslidings of her frail acquaintance. Those who have the fewest resources in themselves naturally seek the food of their self-love elsewhere. The most ignorant people find most to laugh at in strangers; scandal and satire prevail most in country places; and a propensity to ridicule every the slightest or most palpable deviation from what we happen to approve, ceases with the progress of common-sense and decency. True worth does not exult in the faults and deficiencies of others, as true refinement turns away from grossness and deformity, instead of being tempted to indulge in an unmanly triumph over it. Raphael would not faint away at the daubing of a signpost, nor Homer hold his head the higher for being in the company of a Grub Street bard. Real power, real excellence, does not seek for a foil in inferiority, nor fear contamination from coming in contact with that which is coarse and homely. It reposes on itself, and is equally free from spleen and affectation. But the spirit of gentility is the mere essence of spleen and affectation;—of affected delight in its own *would-be* qualifications, and of ineffable disdain poured out upon the involuntary blunders or accidental disadvantages of those whom it chooses to treat as its inferiors. . . .

Now, the essence of vulgarity, I imagine, consists in taking manners, actions, words, opinions, on trust from others, without examining one's own feelings or weighing the merits of the case. It is coarseness or shallowness of taste arising from want of individual refinement, together with the confidence and presumption inspired by example and numbers. It may be defined to be a prostitution of the mind or body to ape the more or less obvious defects of others, because by so doing we shall secure the suffrages of those we associate with. To affect a gesture, an opinion, a phrase, because it is the rage with a large number of persons, or to hold it in abhorrence because another set of persons very little, if at all, better informed cry it down to distinguish themselves from the former, is in either case equal vulgarity and absurdity.—A thing is not vulgar merely because it is common. 'Tis common to breathe, to see, to feel, to live. Nothing is vulgar that is natural, spontaneous, unavoidable. Grossness is not vulgarity, ignorance is not vulgarity, awkwardness is not vulgarity; but all these become vulgar when they are affected and shown off on the authority of others, or to fall

in with *the fashion* or the company we keep. Caliban is coarse enough, but surely he is not vulgar. We might as well spurn the clod under our feet, and call it vulgar. Cobbett is coarse enough, but he is not vulgar. He does not belong to the herd. Nothing real, nothing original, can be vulgar; but I should think an imitator of Cobbett a vulgar man. . . .

There is a well-dressed and an ill-dressed mob, both which I hate. *Odi profanum vulgus, et arceo*. The rapid affectation of the one to me is even more intolerable than the gross insolence and brutality of the other. If a set of low-lived fellows are noisy, rude, and boisterous to show their disregard of the company, a set of fashionable coxcombs are, to a nauseous degree, finical and effeminate to show their thorough breeding. The one are governed by their feelings, however coarse and misguided, which is something; the others consult only appearances, which are nothing, either as a test of happiness or virtue. Hogarth in his prints has trimmed the balance of pretension between the downright blackguard and the *soi-disant* fine gentleman unanswerably. It does not appear in his moral demonstrations (whatever it may do in the genteel letter-writing of Lord Chesterfield or the chivalrous rhapsodies of Burke) that vice by losing all its grossness loses half its evil. It becomes more contemptible, not less disgusting. What is there in common, for instance, between his beaux and belles, his rakes and his coquets, and the men and women, the true heroic and ideal characters in Raphael? But his people of fashion and quality are just upon a par with the low, the selfish, the *unideal* characters in the contrasted view of human life, and are often the very same characters, only changing places. If the lower ranks are actuated by envy and uncharitableness towards the upper, the latter have scarcely any feelings but of pride, contempt, and aversion to the lower. If the poor would pull down the rich to get at their good things, the rich would tread down the poor as in a wine-press, and squeeze the last shilling out of their pockets and the last drop of blood out of their veins. If the headstrong self-will and unruly turbulence of a common alehouse are shocking, what shall we say to the studied insincerity, the insipid want of common-sense, the callous insensibility of the drawing-room and boudoir? I would rather see the feelings of our common nature (for they are the same at bottom) expressed in the most naked and unqualified way, than see every feeling of our nature suppressed, stifled, hermetically sealed under the smooth, cold, glittering varnish of pretended refinement and conventional politeness. The one may be corrected by being better informed; the other is incorrigible, wilful, heartless depravity. I

cannot describe the contempt and disgust I have felt at the tone of what would be thought good company when I have witnessed the sleek, smiling, glossy, gratuitous assumption of superiority to every feeling of humanity, honesty, or principle, as a part of the etiquette, the mental and moral *costume* of the table, and every profession of toleration or favour for the lower orders, that is, for the great mass of our fellow-creatures, treated as an indecorum and breach of the harmony of well-regulated society. . . .

### ON GOING A JOURNEY.

ONE of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.

“The fields his study, nature was his book.”

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticising hedgerows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places, and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room, and fewer encumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude; nor do I ask for

—“a friend in my retreat,  
Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet.”

The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do, just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. It is because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation

“May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,  
That in the various bustle of resort  
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd,”

that I absent myself from the town for a while, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a post-chaise or in a Tilbury, to exchange good things with and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three

hours' march to dinner—and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sunburnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things, like “sunken wrack and sumless treasures,” burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or dull commonplaces, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do; but I sometimes had rather be without them. “Leave, oh, leave me to my repose!” I have just now other business in hand, which would seem idle to you, but is with me “very stuff o’ the conscience.” Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment? Does not this daisy leap to my heart set in its coat of emerald? Yet if I were to explain to you the circumstance that has so endeared it to me, you would only smile. Had I not better, then, keep it to myself, and let it serve me to brood over, from here to yonder craggy point, and from thence onward to the far-distant horizon? I should be but bad company all that way, and therefore prefer being alone. I have heard it said that you may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself, and indulge your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party. “Out upon such half-faced fellowship!” say I. I like to be either entirely to myself or entirely at the disposal of others; to talk or be silent, to walk or sit still, to be sociable or solitary. I was pleased with an observation of Mr. Cobbett’s, that “he thought it a bad French custom to drink our wine with our meals, and that an Englishman ought to do only one thing at a time.” So I cannot talk and think, or indulge in melancholy musing and lively conversation, by fits and starts. “Let me have a companion of my way,” says Sterne, “were it but to remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun declines.” It is beautifully said; but, in my opinion, this continual comparing of notes interferes with the involuntary impression of things upon the mind, and hurts the sentiment. If you only hint what you feel in a kind of dumb show, it is insipid: if you have to explain it, it is making a toil of a pleasure. You cannot read the book of nature without being perpetually put to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of others. I am for this synthetical method on a journey in preference to the analytical. I am content to lay in a stock of ideas then, and to examine and anatomise them afterwards. I want

to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze, and not to have them entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy. For once, I like to have it all my own way; and this is impossible unless you are alone, or in such company as I do not covet. I have no objection to twenty miles of measured road, but not for pleasure. If you remark the scent of a bean-field crossing the road, perhaps your fellow-traveller has no smell. If you point to a distant object, perhaps he is short-sighted, and has to take out his glass to look at it. There is a feeling in the air, a tone in the colour of a cloud, which hits your fancy, but the effect of which you are unable to account for. There is then no sympathy, but an uneasy craving after it, and a dissatisfaction which pursues you on the way, and in the end probably produces ill-humour. Now, I never quarrel with myself, and take all my own conclusions for granted till I find it necessary to defend them against objections. It is not merely that you may not be of accord on the objects and circumstances that present themselves before you—these may recall a number of objects, and lead to associations too delicate and refined to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and sometimes still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To give way to our feelings before company seems extravagance or affectation; and, on the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every turn, and to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not answered), is a task to which few are competent. We must “give it an understanding, but no tongue.” My old friend Coleridge, however, could do both. He could go on in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale a summer’s day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. “He talked far above singing.” If I could so clothe my ideas in sounding and flowing words, I might perhaps wish to have some one with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could be more content, were it possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the woods of All-Foxden. They had “that fine madness in them which our first poets had;” and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument, would have breathed such strains as the following:—

-“ Here be woods as green  
 As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet  
 As when smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet  
 Face of the curled streams, with flow’rs as many  
 As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;  
 Here be all new delights, cool streams and wells,  
 Arbours o’ergrown with woodbines, caves and dells;

Choose where thou wilt, whilst I sit by and sing,  
 Or gather rushes to make many a ring  
 For thy long fingers ; tell thee tales of love,  
 How the pale Phœbe, hunting in a grove,  
 First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes  
 She took eternal fire that never dies ;  
 How she convey'd him softly in a sleep,  
 His temples bound with poppy, to the steep  
 Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,  
 Gilding the mountain with her brother's light,  
 To kiss her sweetest." <sup>1</sup>

Had I words and images at command like these, I would attempt to wake the thoughts that lie slumbering on golden ridges in the evening clouds ; but at the sight of nature my fancy, poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves, like flowers at sunset. I can make nothing out on the spot :—I must have time to collect myself.

In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects : it should be reserved for Table-talk. Lamb is for this reason, I take it, the worst company in the world out of doors ; because he is the best within. I grant there is one subject on which it is pleasant to talk on a journey, and that is, what one shall have for supper when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation, by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavour of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at approach of nightfall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom ; and then after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to "take one's ease at one's inn !" These eventful moments in our lives' history are too precious, too full of solid, heartfelt happiness, to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop : they will do to talk of or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking whole goblets of tea,

"The cups that cheer, but not inebriate,"

and letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall have for supper—eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal-cutlet ! Sancho in such a situation once fixed on cow-heel ; and his choice, though he could not help it, is not to be disparaged. Then, in the intervals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, to catch the preparation and the stir in the kitchen (getting ready for the gentleman in the parlour).

<sup>1</sup> Fletcher's "Faithful Shepherdess."

*Procul, O procul este profani!* These hours are sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; he is a part of the furniture and costume of an inn. If he is a Quaker, or from the West Riding of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to sympathise with him, and he breaks no squares. How I love to see the camps of the gipsies, and to sigh my soul into that sort of life! If I express this feeling to another, he may qualify and spoil it with some objection. I associate nothing with my travelling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of me and my affairs, I in a manner forget myself. But a friend reminds one of other things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character. Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits; or from having some one with you that knows the less sublime portions of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen of the world; but your "unhoused free condition is put into circumspection and confine." The *incognito* of an inn is one of its striking privileges—"lord of one's self, uncumbered with a name." Oh! it is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion; to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties; to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweetbreads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening; and no longer seeking for applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than *the Gentleman in the parlour!* One may take one's choice of all characters in this romantic state of uncertainty as to one's real pretensions, and become indefinitely respectable and negatively right-worshipful. We baffle prejudice and disappoint conjecture; and from being so to others, begin to be objects of curiosity and wonder even to ourselves. We are no more those hackneyed commonplaces that we appear in the world; an inn restores us to the level of nature, and quits scores with society! I have certainly spent some enviable hours at inns,—sometimes when I have been left entirely to myself, and have tried to solve some metaphysical problem, as once at Witham Common, where I found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas,—at other times, when there have been pictures in the room, as at St. Neot's (I think it was), where I first met with Gribelin's engrav-

ings of the Cartoons, into which I entered at once, and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall's drawings, which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn, standing up in a boat between me and the twilight,—at other times I might mention luxuriating in books, with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read "Paul and Virginia," which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madame D'Arblay's "Camilla." It was on the 10th of April 1798 that I sat down to a volume of the "New Eloise," at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. The letter I chose was that in which St. Preux describes his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud, which I had brought with me as a *bon bouche* to crown the evening with. It was my birthday, and I had for the first time come from a place in the neighbourhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham; and on passing a certain point you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with "green upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks" below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time "glittered green with sunny showers," and a budding ash-tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk along the highroad that overlooks the delicious prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr. Coleridge's poems! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, LIBERTY, GENIUS, LOVE, VIRTUE, which have since faded into the light of common day, or mock my idle gaze.

"The beautiful is vanished, and returns not."

Still, I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot; but I would return to it alone. What other self could I find to share that influx of thoughts, of regret, and delight, the fragments of which I could hardly conjure up to myself, so much have they been broken and defaced? I could stand on some tall rock, and overlook the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now? Not only I myself have changed; the



world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, in joy, in youth and gladness, as thou then wert; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink of the waters of life freely!

There is hardly anything that shows the short-sightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than travelling does. With change of place we change our ideas; nay, our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort, indeed, transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the mind revives again; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions; we only shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye; we take our fill of it, and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on, and think no more of it: the horizon that shuts it from our sight also blots it from our memory like a dream. In travelling through a wild barren country, I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget the town, and in town we despise the country. "Beyond Hyde Park," says Sir Toppling Flutter, "all is a desert." All that part of the map that we do not see before us is blank. The world in our conceit of it is not much bigger than a nutshell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, county joined to county, kingdom to kingdom, land to seas, making an image voluminous and vast;—the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written in a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For instance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population known by the name of China to us? An inch of paste-board on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange! Things near us are seen of the size of life: things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even comprehend the texture of our own being only piecemeal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same time excludes all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived, and with which we have intimate associations, every one must

have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression: we remember circumstances, feelings, persons, faces, names that we had not thought of for years; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten!—To return to the question I have quitted above:—

I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, but rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters, and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt. Salisbury Plain is barren of criticism, but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration always is where we shall go to: in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. "The mind is its own place;" nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honours indifferently well to works of art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean *éclat*—showed them that seat of the Muses at a distance,

" With glistening spires and pinnacles adorn'd ;"

descanted on the learned air that breathes from the grassy quadrangles and stone walls of halls and colleges; was at home in the Bodleian; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powdered cicerone that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to commonplace beauties in matchless pictures. As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishman to foreign manners and notions that requires the assistance of social sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen: there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome that claims the utterance of speech; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite to all one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by one's self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support. Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set my foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine

poured into my ears; nor did the mariners' hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I only breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over "the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France," erect and satisfied; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones: I was at no loss for language, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled; nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French people!—There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else; but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference, and, like a dream or another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but a momentary hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must "jump" all our present comforts and connections. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad. In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and, in one sense, instructive; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable, individual all the time we are out of our own country. We are lost to ourselves as well as our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings:

"Out of my country and myself I go."

Those who wish to forget painful thoughts do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recall them: but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!

### ON COFFEE-HOUSE POLITICIANS.

... I LIKE very well to sit in a room where there are people talking on subjects I know nothing of, if I am only allowed to sit silent and as a spectator; but I do not much like to join in the

conversation, except with people and on subjects to my taste. Sympathy is necessary to society. To look on a variety of faces, humours, and opinions is sufficient: to mix with others, agreement as well as variety is indispensable. What makes good society? I answer, in one word, real fellowship. Without a similitude of tastes, acquirements, and pursuits (whatever may be the difference of tempers and characters) there can be no intimacy or even casual intercourse worth the having. What makes the most agreeable party? A number of people with a number of ideas in common, "yet so as with a difference;" that is, who can put one or more subjects which they have all studied in the greatest variety of entertaining or useful lights. Or in other words, a succession of good things said with good humour, and addressed to the understandings of those who hear them, make the most desirable conversation. Ladies, lovers, beaux, wits, philosophers, the fashionable or the vulgar, are the fittest company for one another. The discourse at Randal's is the best for boxers; that at Long's for lords and loungers. I prefer Hunt's conversation almost to any other person's, because, with a familiar range of subjects, he colours with a totally new and sparkling light, reflected from his own character. Elia, the grave and witty, says things not to be surpassed in essence; but the manner is more painful and less a relief to my own thoughts. Some one conceived he could not be an excellent companion because he was seen walking down the side of the Thames, *passibus iniquis*, after dining at Richmond. The objection was not valid. I will, however, admit that the said Elia is the worst company in the world in bad company, if it be granted me that in good company he is nearly the best that can be. He is one of those of whom it may be said, *Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your manners*. He is the creature of sympathy, and makes good whatever opinion you seem to entertain of him. He cannot outgo the apprehensions of the circle, and invariably acts up or down to the point of refinement or vulgarity at which they pitch him. He appears to take a pleasure in exaggerating the prejudice of strangers against him; a pride in confirming the prepossessions of friends. In whatever scale of intellect he is placed, he is as lively or as stupid as the rest can be for their lives. If you think him odd and ridiculous, he becomes more and more so every minute, *à la folie*, till he is a wonder gazed [at] by all—set him against a good wit and a ready apprehension. and he brightens more and more—

—— "Or like a gate of steel  
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back  
Its figure and its heat."

We had a pleasant party one evening at Procter's. A young literary bookseller who was present went away delighted with the elegance of the repast, and spoke in raptures of a servant in green livery and a patent-lamp. I thought myself that the charm of the evening consisted in some talk about Beaumont and Fletcher and the old poets, in which every one took part or interest, and in a consciousness that we could not pay our host a better compliment than in thus alluding to studies in which he excelled, and in praising authors whom he had imitated with feeling and sweetness!—I should think it may also be laid down as a rule on this subject, that to constitute good company a certain proportion of hearers and speakers is requisite. Coleridge makes good company for this reason. He immediately establishes the principle of the division of labour in this respect, wherever he comes. He takes his cue as speaker, and the rest of the party theirs as listeners—a “Circean herd”—without any previous arrangement having been gone through. I will just add that there can be no good society without perfect freedom from affectation and constraint. If the unreserved communication of feeling or opinion leads to offensive familiarity, it is not well; but it is no better where the absence of offensive remarks arises only from formality and an assumed respectfulness of manner.

I do not think there is anything deserving the name of society to be found out of London: and that for the two following reasons. First, there is *neighbourhood* elsewhere, accidental or unavoidable acquaintance: people are thrown together by chance or grow together like trees; but you can pick your society nowhere but in London. The very persons that of all others you would wish to associate with in almost every line of life (or at least of intellectual pursuit) are to be met with there. It is hard if out of a million of people you cannot find half-a-dozen to your liking. Individuals may seem lost and hid in the size of the place; but, in fact, from this very circumstance you are within two or three miles' reach of persons that without it you would be some hundreds apart from. Secondly, London is the only place in which each individual in company is treated according to his value in company, and to that only. In every other part of the kingdom he carries another character about with him, which supersedes the intellectual or social one. It is known in Manchester or Liverpool what every man in the room is worth in land or money; what are his connections and prospects in life; and this gives a character of servility or arrogance, of mercenariness, or impertinence to the whole of provincial intercourse. You laugh not in proportion to a man's wit, but his wealth; you have to consider not what but whom you contradict. You speak by the

pound, and are heard by the rood. In the metropolis there is neither time nor inclination for these remote calculations. Every man depends on the quantity of sense, wit, or good manners he brings into society for the reception he meets with in it. A member of Parliament soon finds his level as a commoner: the merchant and manufacturer cannot bring his goods to market here: the great landed proprietor shrinks from being the lord of acres into a pleasant companion or a dull fellow. When a visitor enters or leaves a room, it is not inquired whether he is rich or poor, whether he lives in a garret or a palace, or comes in his own or a hackney-coach, but whether he has a good expression of countenance, with an unaffected manner, and whether he is a man of understanding or a blockhead. These are the circumstances by which you make a favourable impression on the company, and by which they estimate you in the abstract. In the country, they consider whether you have a vote at the next election or a place in your gift, and measure the capacity of others to instruct or entertain them by the strength of their pockets and their credit with their banker. Personal merit is at a prodigious discount in the provinces. I like the country very well, if I want to enjoy my own company; but London is the only place for equal society, or where a man can say a good thing or express an honest opinion without subjecting himself to being insulted, unless he first lays his purse on the table to back his pretensions to talent or independence of spirit. I speak from experience.

## ON FAMILIAR STYLE.

. . . MR. LAMB is the only imitator of old English style I can read with pleasure; and he is so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his authors, that the idea of imitation is almost done away. There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein both in the thought and feeling, an intuition, deep and lively, of his subject, that carries off any quaintness or awkwardness arising from an antiquated style and dress. The matter is completely his own, though the manner is assumed. Perhaps his ideas are altogether so marked and individual as to require their point and pungency to be neutralised by the affectation of a singular but traditional form of conveyance. Tricked out in the prevailing costume, they would probably seem more startling and out of the way. The old English authors, Burton, Fuller, Coryat, Sir Thomas Brown, are a kind of mediators between us and the more eccentric and whimsical modern, reconciling us to his peculiarities. I do not, however, know how far this is the case or not till

he condescends to write like one of us. I must confess that what I like best of his papers under the signature of Elia (still, I do not presume, amidst such excellence, to decide what is most excellent) is the account of "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," which is also the most free from obsolete allusions and turns of expression :

"A well of native English undefiled."

To those acquainted with his admired prototypes, these Essays of the ingenious and highly-gifted author have the same sort of charm and relish that Erasmus's Colloquies or a fine piece of modern Latin have to the classical scholar. Certainly, I do not know any borrowed pencil that has more power or felicity of execution than the one of which I have here been speaking.

It is as easy to write a gaudy style without ideas as it is to spread a pallet of showy colours or to smear in a flaunting transparency. "What do you read?"—"Words, words, words."—"What is the matter?"—"Nothing," it might be answered. The florid style is the reverse of the familiar. The last is employed as an unvarnished medium to convey ideas; the first is resorted to as a spangled veil to conceal the want of them. When there is nothing to be set down but words, it costs little to have them fine. Look through the Dictionary, and cull out a *florilegium*, rival the *tulippomania*. Rouge high enough, and never mind the natural complexion. The vulgar, who are not in the secret, will admire the look of preternatural health and vigour; and the fashionable, who regard only appearances, will be delighted with the imposition. Keep to your sounding generalities, your tinkling phrases, and all will be well. Swell out an unmeaning truism to a perfect tympany of style. A thought, a distinction, is the rock on which all this brittle cargo of verbiage splits at once. Such writers have merely *verbal* imaginations, that retain nothing but words. Or their puny thoughts have dragon-wings, all green and gold. They soar far above the vulgar failing of the *Sermo humi obrepens*—their most ordinary speech is never short of an hyperbole, splendid, imposing, vague, incomprehensible, magniloquent, a cento of sounding commonplaces. If some of us, whose "ambition is more lowly," pry a little too narrowly into nooks and corners to pick up a number of "unconsidered trifles," they never once direct their eyes or lift their hands to seize on any but the most gorgeous, tarnished, threadbare patchwork set of phrases, the left-off finery of poetic extravagance, transmitted down through successive generations of barren pretenders. If they criticise actors and actresses, a huddled phantasmagoria of feathers, spangles, floods of light, and oceans of sound float before

their morbid sense, which they paint in the style of Ancient Pistol. Not a glimpse can you get of the merits or defects of the performers: they are hidden in a profusion of barbarous epithets and wilful rhodomontade. Our hypercritics are not thinking of these little fantoccini beings,

“That strut and fret their hour upon the stage,”

but of tall phantoms of words, abstractions, *genera* and *species*, sweeping clauses, periods that unite the Poles, forced alliterations, astounding antitheses:

“And on their pens *Fustian* sits plumed.”

If they describe kings and queens, it is an Eastern pageant. The Coronation at either House is nothing to it. We get at four repeated images—a curtain, a throne, a sceptre, and a footstool. These are with them the wardrobe of a lofty imagination; and they turn their servile strains to servile uses. Do we read a description of pictures? It is not a reflection of tones and hues which “nature’s own sweet and cunning hand laid on,” but piles of precious stones, rubies, pearls, emeralds, Golconda’s mines, and all the blazonry of art. Such persons are, in fact, besotted with words, and their brains are turned with the glittering, but empty and sterile phantoms of things. Personifications, capital letters, seas of sunbeams, visions of glory, shining inscriptions, the figures of a transparency, Britannia with her shield, or Hope leaning on an anchor, make up their stock-in-trade. They may be considered as *hieroglyphical* writers. Images stand out in their minds isolated and important merely in themselves, without any groundwork of feeling—there is no context in their imaginations. Words affect them in the same way, by the mere sound, that is, by their possible, not by their actual, application to the subject in hand. They are fascinated by first appearances, and have no sense of consequences. Nothing more is meant by them than meets the ear: they understand or feel nothing more than meets their eye. The web and texture of the universe, and of the heart of man, is a mystery to them: they have no faculty that strikes a chord in unison with it. They cannot get beyond the daubings of fancy, the varnish of sentiment. Objects are not linked to feelings, words to things, but images revolve in splendid mockery, words represent themselves in their strange rhapsodies. The categories of such a mind are pride and ignorance—pride in outside show, to which they sacrifice everything, and ignorance of the true worth and hidden structure both of words and things. With a sovereign contempt for what is familiar and natural,



they are the slaves of vulgar affectation—of a routine of high-flown phrases. Scorning to imitate realities, they are unable to invent anything, to strike out one original idea. They are not copyists of nature, it is true; but they are the poorest of all plagiarists, the plagiarists of words. All is far-fetched, dear-bought, artificial, oriental, in subject and allusion: all is mechanical, conventional, vapid, formal, pedantic, in style and execution. They startle and confound the understanding of the reader by the remoteness and obscurity of their illustrations: they soothe the ear by the monotony of the same everlasting round of circuitous metaphors. They are the *mock-school* in poetry and prose. They flounder about between fustian in expression and bathos in sentiment. They tantalise the fancy, but never reach the head nor touch the heart. Their Temple of Fame is like a shadowy structure raised by Dulness to Vanity, or like Cowper's description of the Empress of Russia's palace of ice, "as worthless as in show 'twas glittering:"

"It smiled, and it was cold!"

#### ON EFFEMINACY OF CHARACTER.

. . . BUT oh thou! who didst lend me speech when I was dumb, to whom I owe it that I have not crept on my belly all the days of my life like the serpent, but sometimes lift my forked crest or tread the empyrean, wake thou out of thy midday slumbers!<sup>1</sup> Shake off the heavy honeydew of thy soul, no longer lulled with that Circean cup, drinking thy own thoughts with thy own ears, but start up in thy promised likeness, and shake the pillared rottenness of the world! Leave not thy sounding words in air; write them in marble, and teach the coming age heroic truths! Up, and wake the echoes of Time! Rich in deepest lore, die not the bed-ridden churl of knowledge, leaving the survivors unblest! Set, set as thou didst rise in pomp and gladness! Dart like the sunflower one broad, golden flash of light; and ere thou ascendest thy native sky, show us the steps by which thou didst scale the Heaven of philosophy, with Truth and Fancy for thy equal guides, that we may catch thy mantle, rainbow-dipped, and still read thy words dear to Memory, dearer to Fame!

There is another branch of this character, which is the trifling or dilatory character. Such persons are always creating difficulties, and unable or unwilling to remove them. They cannot brush aside a cobweb, and are stopped by an insect's wing. Their character

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge is the person here addressed.

is imbecility, rather than effeminacy. The want of energy and resolution in the persons last described arises from the habitual and inveterate predominance of other feelings and motives; in these it is a mere want of energy and resolution, that is, an inherent natural defect of vigour of nerve and voluntary power. There is a specific levity about such persons, so that you cannot propel them to any object or give them a decided momentum in any direction or pursuit. They turn back, as it were, on the occasion that should project them forward with manly force and vehemence. They shrink from in-  
trepidity of purpose, and are alarmed at the idea of attaining their end too soon. They will not act with steadiness or spirit, either for themselves or you. If you chalk out a line of conduct for them, or commission them to execute a certain task, they are sure to conjure up some insignificant objection or fanciful impediment in the way, and are withheld from striking an effectual blow by mere feebleness of character. They may be officious, good-natured, friendly, generous in disposition, but they are of no use to any one. They will put themselves to twice the trouble you desire, not to carry your point, but to defeat it; and in obviating needless objections, neglect the main business. If they do what you want, it is neither at the time nor in the manner that you wish. This timidity amounts to treachery; for by always anticipating some misfortune or disgrace, they realise their unmeaning apprehensions. The little bears sway in their minds over the great: a small inconvenience outweighs a solid and indispensable advantage; and their strongest bias is uniformly derived from the weakest motive. They hesitate about the best way of beginning a thing till the opportunity for action is lost, and are less anxious about its being done than the precise manner of doing it. They will destroy a passage sooner than let an objectionable word pass, and are much less concerned about the truth or the beauty of an image than about the reception it will meet with from the critics. They alter what they write, not because it is, but because it may possibly be wrong, and in their tremulous solicitude to avoid imaginary blunders, run into real ones. What is curious enough is, that with all this caution and delicacy, they are continually liable to extraordinary oversights. They are, in fact, so full of all sorts of idle apprehensions, that they do not know how to distinguish real from imaginary grounds of apprehension; and they often give some unaccountable offence either from assuming a sudden boldness half in sport, or while they are secretly pluming themselves on their dexterity in avoiding everything exceptionable; and the same distraction of motive and short-sightedness which gets them into scrapes hinders them from seeing their way out of them.

Such persons (often of ingenious and susceptible minds) are constantly at cross-purposes with themselves and others; will neither do things nor let others do them; and whether they succeed or fail, never feel confident or at their ease. They spoil the freshness and originality of their own thoughts by asking contradictory advice; and in befriending others, while they are *about it and about it*, you might have done the thing yourself a dozen times over.

There is nothing more to be esteemed than a manly firmness and decision of character. I like a person who knows his own mind and sticks to it; who sees at once what is to be done in given circumstances and does it. He does not beat about the bush for difficulties or excuses, but goes the shortest and most effectual way to work to attain his own ends or to accomplish a useful object. If he can serve you, he will do so; if he cannot, he will say so without keeping you in needless suspense or laying you under pretended obligations. The applying to him in any laudable undertaking is not like stirring "a dish of skimmed milk." There is stuff in him, and it is of the right, practicable sort. He is not all his life at hawk-and-buzzard whether he shall be a Whig or a Tory, a friend or a foe, a knave or a fool, but thinks that life is short, and that there is no time to play fantastic tricks in it, to tamper with principles or trifle with individual feelings. If he gives you a character, he does not add a damning clause to it: he does not pick holes in you lest others should, or anticipate objections lest he should be thought to be blinded by a childish partiality. His object is to serve you, and not to play the game into your enemies' hands.

"A generous friendship no cold medium knows,  
Burns with one love, with one resentment glows."

### WHY DISTANT OBJECTS PLEASE.

DISTANT objects please because, in the first place, they imply an idea of space and magnitude, and because, not being obtruded too close upon the eye, we clothe them with the indistinct and airy colours of fancy. In looking at the misty mountain-tops that bound the horizon, the mind is, as it were, conscious of all the conceivable objects and interests that lie between; we imagine all sorts of adventures in the interim; strain our hopes and wishes to reach the air-drawn circle, or to "descry new lands, rivers, and mountains," stretching far beyond it: our feelings, carried out of themselves, lose their grossness and their husk, are rarefied, expanded, melt into softness and brighten into beauty, turning to ethereal mould,

sky-tinctured. We drink the air before us, and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothing. Where the landscape fades from the dull sight, we fill the thin, viewless space with shapes of unknown good, and tinge the hazy prospect with hopes and wishes and more charming fears.

“ But thou, oh Hope ! with eyes so fair,  
What was thy delighted measure ?  
Still it whisper'd promised pleasure,  
And bade the lovely scenes at distance hail ! ”

Whatever is placed beyond the reach of sense and knowledge, whatever is imperfectly discerned, the fancy pieces out at its leisure ; and all but the present moment, but the present spot, passion claims for its own, and brooding over it with wings outspread, stamps it with an image of itself. Passion is lord of infinite space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines and are moulded by its touch. When I was a boy I lived within sight of a range of lofty hills, whose blue tops blending with the setting sun had often tempted my longing eyes and wandering feet. At last I put my project in execution, and on a nearer approach, instead of glimmering air woven into fantastic shapes, found them huge lumpish heaps of discoloured earth. I learnt from this (in part) to leave “ Yarrow unvisited,” and not idly to disturb a dream of good !

Distance of time has much the same effect as distance of place. It is not surprising that fancy colours the prospect of the future as it thinks good, when it even effaces the forms of memory. Time takes out the sting of pain ; our sorrows after a certain period have been so often steeped in a medium of thought and passion, that they “ un mould their essence,” and all that remains of our original impressions is what we would wish them to have been. Not only the untried steep ascent before us, but the rude, unsightly masses of our past experience presently resume their power of deception over the eye ; the golden cloud soon rests upon their heads, and the purple light of fancy clothes their barren sides ! Thus we pass on, while both ends of our existence touch upon heaven ! There is (so to speak) “ a mighty stream of tendency ” to good in the human mind, upon which all objects float and are imperceptibly borne along ; and though in the voyage of life we meet with strong rebuffs, with rocks and quicksands, yet there is “ a tide in the affairs of men,” a heaving and a restless aspiration of the soul, by means of which, “ with sails and tackle torn,” the wreck and scattered fragments of our entire being drift into the port and haven of our desires ! In all that relates to the affections we put the will for the deed ;—so that the

instant the pressure of unwelcome circumstances is removed the mind recoils from their hold, recovers its elasticity, and reunites itself to that image of good, which is but a reflection and configuration of its own nature. Seen in the distance, in the long perspective of waning years, the meanest incidents, enlarged and enriched by countless recollections, become interesting; the most painful, broken and softened by time, soothe. How any object that unexpectedly brings back to us old scenes and associations startles the mind! What a yearning it creates within us! what a longing to leap the intermediate space! How fondly we cling to and try to revive the impression of all that we then were!

“Such tricks hath strong imagination!”

In truth, we impose upon ourselves, and know not what we wish. It is a cunning artifice, a quaint delusion, by which, in pretending to be what we were at a particular moment of time, we would fain be all that we have since been, and have our lives to come over again. It is not the little, glimmering, almost annihilated speck in the distance that rivets our attention and “hangs upon the beating of our hearts;” it is the interval that separates us from it, and of which it is the trembling boundary, that excites all this coil and mighty pudder in the breast. Into that great gap in our being “come thronging soft desires” and infinite regrets. It is the contrast, the change from what we then were, that arms the half-extinguished recollection with its giant strength and lifts the fabric of the affections from its shadowy base. In contemplating its utmost verge we overlook the map of our existence, and retread, in apprehension, the journey of life. So it is that in early youth we strain our eager sight after the pursuits of manhood, and as we are sliding off the stage, strive to gather up the toys and flowers that pleased our thoughtless childhood.

When I was quite a boy my father used to take me to the Montpelier Tea-gardens at Walworth. Do I go there now? No; the place is deserted, and its borders and its beds o’turned. Is there, then, nothing that can

—“Bring back the hour  
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower?”

Oh yes! I unlock the casket of memory and draw back the warders of the brain, and there this scene of my infant wanderings still lives unfaded, or with fresher dyes. A new sense comes upon me, as in a dream; a richer perfume, brighter colours start out; my eyes dazzle; my heart heaves with its new load of bliss, and I am a child again.

My sensations are all glossy, spruce, voluptuous, and fine: they wear a candied coat, and are in holiday trim. I see the beds of larkspur with purple eyes; tall hollyhocks, red or yellow; the broad sun-flowers, caked in gold, with bees buzzing round them; wildernesses of pinks, and hot glowing peonies; poppies run to seed; the sugared lily and faint mignonette, all ranged in order, and as thick as they can grow; the box-tree borders; the gravel-walks, the painted alcove, the confectionery, the clotted cream:—I think I see them now with sparkling looks; or have they vanished while I have been writing this description of them? No matter; they will return again when I least think of them. All that I have observed since, of flowers and plants, and grass-plots, and of suburb delights, seems to me borrowed from “that first garden of my innocence”—to be slips and scions stolen from that bed of memory. In this manner the darlings of our childhood burnish out in the eye of after years, and derive their sweetest perfume from the first heartfelt sigh of pleasure breathed upon them,

—‘ Like the sweet south,  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour!’

If I have pleasure in a flower-garden, I have in a kitchen-garden too, and for the same reason. If I see a row of cabbage-plants or of peas or beans coming up, I immediately think of those which I used so carefully to water of an evening at Wem, when my day’s tasks were done, and of the pain with which I saw them droop and hang down their leaves in the morning’s sun. Again, I never see a child’s kite in the air but it seems to pull at my heart. It is to me “a thing of life.” I feel the twinge at my elbow, the flutter and palpitation, with which I used to let go the string of my own, as it rose in the air and towered among the clouds. My little cargo of hopes and fears ascended with it; and as it made a part of my own consciousness then, it does so still, and appears “like some gay creature of the element,” my playmate when life was young, and twin-born with my earliest recollections. I could enlarge on this subject of childish amusements, but Mr. Leigh Hunt has treated it so well, in a paper in the *Indicator* on the productions of the toy-shops of the metropolis, that if I were to insist more on it I should only pass for an imitator of that ingenious and agreeable writer, *and for an indifferent one into the bargain.*

Sounds, smells, and sometimes tastes are remembered longer than visible objects, and serve, perhaps, better for links in the chain of association. The reason seems to be this: they are in their nature

intermittent, and comparatively rare; whereas objects of sight are always before us, and, by their continuous succession, drive one another out. The eye is always open; and between any given impression and its recurrence a second time, fifty thousand other impressions have, in all likelihood, been stamped upon the sense and on the brain. The other senses are not so active or vigilant. They are but seldom called into play. The ear, for example, is oftener courted by silence than noise; and the sounds that break that silence sink deeper and more durably into the mind. I have a more present and lively recollection of certain scents, tastes, and sounds, for this reason, than I have of mere visible images, because they are more original, and less worn by frequent repetition. Where there is nothing interposed between any two impressions, whatever the distance of time that parts them, they naturally seem to touch; and the renewed impression recalls the former one in full force, without distraction or competitor. The taste of barberries which have hung out in the snow during the severity of a North American winter I have in my mouth still, after an interval of thirty years;<sup>1</sup> for I have met with no other taste, in all that time, at all like it. It remains by itself, almost like the impression of a sixth sense. But the colour is mixed up indiscriminately with the colours of many other berries, nor should I be able to distinguish it among them. The smell of a brickkiln carries the evidence of its own identity with it: neither is it to me (from peculiar associations) unpleasant. The colour of brickdust, on the contrary, is more common, and easily confounded with other colours. Raphael did not keep it quite distinct from his flesh-colour. I will not say that we have a more perfect recollection of the human voice than of that complex picture the human face, but I think the sudden hearing of a well-known voice has something in it more affecting and striking than the sudden meeting with the face: perhaps, indeed, this may be because we have a more familiar remembrance of the one than the other, and the voice takes us more by surprise on that account. I am by no means certain (generally speaking) that we have the ideas of the other senses so accurate and well made out as those of visible form: what I chiefly mean is, that the feelings belonging to the sensations of our other organs, when accidentally recalled, are kept more separate and pure. Musical sounds, probably, owe a good deal of their interest and romantic effect to the principle here spoken of. Were they constant they would become indifferent, as we may find with respect to disagreeable noises, which we do not hear after a time. I know no

<sup>1</sup> See "Memoirs of William Hazlitt," 1867, i. 6, 7.—ED.

situation more pitiable than that of a blind fiddler, who has but one sense left (if we except the sense of snuff-taking<sup>1</sup>), and who has that stunned or deafened by his own villainous noises. Shakspeare says :

“How silver-sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night !”

It has been observed in explanation of this passage, that it is because in the day-time lovers are occupied with one another’s faces, but that at night they can only distinguish the sound of each other’s voices. I know not how this may be ; but I have, ere now, heard a voice break so upon the silence,

“To angels’ ’twas most like,

and charm the moonlight air with its balmy essence, that the budding leaves trembled to its accents. Would I might have heard it once more whisper peace and hope (as erst when it was mingled with the breath of spring), and with its soft pulsations lift winged fancy to heaven ! But it has ceased, or turned where I no more shall hear it !—Hence, also, we see what is the charm of the shepherd’s pastoral reed ; and why we hear him, as it were, piping to his flock, even in a picture. Our ears are fancy stung ! I remember once strolling along the margin of a stream, skirted with willows and plashy sedges, in one of those low sheltered valleys on Salisbury Plain where the monks of former ages had planted chapels and built hermits’ cells. There was a little parish church near, but tall elms and quivering alders hid it from my sight, when, all of a sudden, I was startled by the sound of the full organ pealing on the ear, accompanied by rustic voices and the willing choir of village maids and children. It rose, indeed, “like an exhalation of rich distilled perfumes.” The dew from a thousand pastures was gathered in its softness ; the silence of a thousand years spoke in it. It came upon the heart like the calm beauty of death ; fancy caught the sound, and faith mounted on it to the skies. It filled the valley like a mist, and still poured out its endless chant, and still it swells upon the ear, and wraps me in a golden trance, drowning the noisy tumult of the world ! . . .

## ON THE DISADVANTAGES OF INTELLECTUAL SUPERIORITY.

THE chief disadvantage of knowing more and seeing farther than others is not to be generally understood. A man is, in consequence

<sup>1</sup> See Wilkie’s “Blind Fiddler.”



of this, liable to start paradoxes, which immediately transport him beyond the reach of the commonplace reader. A person speaking once in a slighting manner of a very original-minded man, received for answer—"He strides on so far before you that he dwindles in the distance!"

Petrarch complains, that "nature had made him different from other people"—*singular' d'altri genti*. The great happiness of life is, to be neither better nor worse than the general run of those you meet with. If you are beneath them, you are trampled upon; if you are above them, you soon find a mortifying level in their indifference to what you particularly pique yourself upon. What is the use of being moral in a night-cellar or wise in Bedlam? "To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand." So says Shakspeare; and the commentators have not added that, under these circumstances, a man is more likely to become the butt of slander than the mark of admiration for being so. "How now, thou particular fellow?" is the common answer to all such out-of-the-way pretensions. By not doing [at Rome] as those at Rome do, we cut ourselves off from good-fellowship and society. We speak another language, have notions of our own, and are treated as of a different species. Nothing can be more awkward than to intrude with any such far-fetched ideas among the common herd.

Ignorance of another's meaning is a sufficient cause of fear, and fear produces hatred: hence the suspicion and rancour entertained against all those who set up for greater refinement and wisdom than their neighbours. It is in vain to think of softening down this spirit of hostility by simplicity of manners, or by condescending to persons of low estate. The more you condescend, the more they will presume upon it; they will fear you less, but hate you more, and will be the more determined to take their revenge on you for a superiority as to which they are entirely in the dark, and of which you yourself seem to entertain considerable doubt. All the humility in the world will only pass for weakness and folly. They have no notion of such a thing. They always put their best foot forward, and argue that you would do the same if you had any such wonderful talents as people say. You had better, therefore, play off the great man at once—hector, swagger, talk big, and ride the high horse over them: you may by this means extort outward respect or common civility; but you will get nothing (with low people) by forbearance and good-nature but open insult or silent contempt. Coleridge always talks to people about what they don't understand: I, for one, endeavour to talk to them about what they do under-

stand, and find I only get the more ill-will by it. They conceive I do not think them capable of anything better; that I do not think it worth while, as the vulgar saying is, to *throw a word to a dog*. I once complained of this to Coleridge, thinking it hard I should be sent to Coventry for not making a prodigious display. He said, "As you assume a certain character, you ought to produce your credentials. It is a tax upon people's good-nature to admit superiority of any kind, even where there is the most evident proof of it; but it is too hard a task for the imagination to admit it without any apparent ground at all."

There is not a greater error than to suppose that you avoid the envy, malice, and uncharitableness so common in the world by going among people without pretensions. There are no people who have no pretensions; or the fewer their pretensions, the less they can afford to acknowledge yours without some sort of value received. The more information individuals possess, or the more they have refined upon any subject, the more readily can they conceive and admit the same kind of superiority to themselves that they feel over others. But from the low, dull, level sink of ignorance and vulgarity no idea or love of excellence can arise. You think you are doing mighty well with them; that you are laying aside the buckram of pedantry and pretence, and getting the character of a plain, unassuming, good sort of fellow. It will not do. All the while that you are making these familiar advances, and wanting to be at your ease, they are trying to recover the wind of you. You may forget that you are an author, an artist, or what not — they do not forget that they are nothing, nor bate one jot of their desire to prove you in the same predicament. . . .

Meanwhile, those things in which you may really excel go for nothing, because they cannot judge of them. They speak highly of some book which you do not like, and therefore you make no answer. You recommend them to go and see some picture in which they do not find much to admire. How are you to convince them that you are right? Can you make them perceive that the fault is in them, and not in the picture, unless you could give them your knowledge? They hardly distinguish the difference between a Correggio and a common daub. Does this bring you any nearer to an understanding? The more you know of the difference, the more deeply you feel it, or the more earnestly you wish to convey it, the farther do you find yourself removed to an immeasurable distance from the possibility of making them enter into views and feelings of which they have not even the first rudiments. You cannot make them see with your eyes, and they must judge for themselves,

Intellectual is not like bodily strength. You have no hold of the understanding of others but by their sympathy. Your knowing, in fact, so much more about a subject does not give you a superiority, that is, a power over them, but only renders it the more impossible for you to make the least impression on them. Is it, then, an advantage to you? It may be, as it relates to your own private satisfaction, but it places a greater gulf between you and society. It throws stumbling-blocks in your way at every turn. All that you take most pride and pleasure in is lost upon the vulgar eye. What they are pleased with is a matter of indifference or of distaste to you. . . .

It is recorded in the life of some worthy (whose name I forget) that he was one of those "who loved hospitality and respect:" and I profess to belong to the same classification of mankind. Civility is with me a jewel. I like a little comfortable cheer and careless, indolent chat. I hate to be always wise, or aiming at wisdom. I have enough to do with literary cabals, questions, critics, actors, essay-writing, without taking them out with me for recreation and into all companies. I wish at these times to pass for a good-humoured fellow; and good-will is all I ask in return to make good company. I do not desire to be always posing myself or others with the questions of fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute, &c. I must unbend sometimes. I must occasionally lie fallow. The kind of conversation that I affect most is what sort of a day it is, and whether it is likely to rain or hold up fine for to-morrow. This I consider as enjoying the *otium cum dignitate*, as the end and privilege of a life of study. I would resign myself to this state of easy indifference, but I find I cannot. I must maintain a certain pretension, which is far enough from my wish. I must be put on my defence, I must take up the gauntlet continually, or I find I lose ground. "I am nothing, if not critical." While I am thinking what o'clock it is, or how I came to blunder in quoting a well-known passage, as if I had done it on purpose, others are thinking whether I am not really as dull a fellow as I am sometimes said to be. If a drizzling shower patters against the windows, it puts me in mind of a mild spring rain from which I retired twenty years ago into a little public-house near Wem, in Shropshire, and while I saw the plants and shrubs before the door imbibe the dewy moisture, quaffed a glass of sparkling ale, and walked home in the dusk of evening, brighter to me than noonday suns at present are! Would I indulge this feeling? In vain. They ask me what news there is, and stare if I say I don't know. If a new actress has come out, why must I have seen her? If a new novel has appeared, why must I

have read it? I, at one time, used to go and take a hand at cribbage with a friend, and afterwards discuss a cold sirloin of beef, and throw out a few lackadaisical remarks, in a way to please myself, but it would not do long. I set up little pretension, and therefore the little that I did set up was taken from me. As I said nothing on that subject myself, it was continually thrown in my teeth that I was *an author*. From having me at this disadvantage, my friend wanted to peg on a hole or two in the game, and was displeased if I would not let him. If I won of him, it was hard he should be beat by an author. If he won, it would be strange if he did not understand the game better than I did. If I mentioned my favourite game of rackets, there was a general silence, as if this was my weak point. If I complained of being ill, it was asked why I made myself so. If I said such an actor had played a part well, the answer was, there was a different account in one of the newspapers. If any allusion was made to men of letters, there was a suppressed smile. If I told a humorous story, it was difficult to say whether the laugh was at me or at the narrative. The wife hated me for my ugly face; the servants because I could not always get them tickets for the play, and because they could not tell exactly what an author meant. If a paragraph appeared against anything I had written, I found it was ready there before me, and I was to undergo a regular *roasting*. I submitted to all this till I was tired, and then I gave it up. . . .

## ON THE FEAR OF DEATH.

“And our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

PERHAPS the best cure for the fear of death is to reflect that life has a beginning as well as an end. There was a time when we were not: this gives us no concern—why, then, should it trouble us that a time will come when we shall cease to be? I have no wish to have been alive a hundred years ago, or in the reign of Queen Anne: why should I regret and lay it so much to heart that I shall not be alive a hundred years hence, in the reign of I cannot tell whom?

When Dickerstaff wrote his Essays, I knew nothing of the subjects of them; nay, much later, and but the other day, as it were, in the beginning of the reign of George III., when Goldsmith, Johnson, Burke, used to meet at the Globe, when Garrick was in his glory, and Reynolds was over head and ears with his portraits, and Sterne brought out the volumes of “*Tristram Shandy*” year by

year, it was without consulting me: I had not the slightest intimation of what was going on: the debates in the House of Commons on the American war or the firing at Bunker's Hill disturbed not me: yet I thought this no evil—I neither ate, drank, nor was merry, yet I did not complain: I had not then looked out into this breathing world, yet I was well; and the world did quite as well without me as I did without it! Why, then, should I make all this outcry about parting with it, and being no worse off than I was before? There is nothing in the recollection that at a certain time we were not come into the world, that “the gorge rises at”—why should we revolt at the idea that we must one day go out of it? To die is only to be as we were before we were born: yet no one feels any remorse, or regret, or repugnance, in contemplating this last idea. It is rather a relief and disburdening of the mind: it seems to have been holiday-time with us then: we were not called to appear upon the stage of life, to wear robes or tatters, to laugh or cry, be hooted or applauded; we had lain *perdus* all this while, snug, out of harm's way; and had slept out our thousands of centuries without wanting to be waked up; at peace and free from care, in a long nonage, in a sleep deeper and calmer than that of infancy, wrapped in the softest and finest dust. And the worst that we dread is, after a short, fretful, feverish being, after vain hopes and idle fears, to sink to final repose again, and forget the troubled dream of life! . . . Ye armed men, knights templars, that sleep in the stone aisles of that old Temple church, where all is silent above, and where a deeper silence reigns below (not broken by the pealing organ), are ye not contented where ye lie? Or would you come out of your long homes to go to the Holy War? Or do you complain that pain no longer visits you; that sickness has done its worst; that you have paid the last debt to nature; that you hear no more of the thickening phalanx of the foe or your lady's waning love; and that while this ball of earth rolls its eternal round, no sound shall ever pierce through to disturb your lasting repose, fixed as the marble over your tombs, breathless as the grave that holds you! And thou, oh! thou, to whom my heart turns, and will turn while it has feeling left, who didst love in vain, and whose first was thy last sigh, wilt not thou too rest in peace (or wilt thou cry to me complaining from thy clay-cold bed?) when that sad heart is no longer sad, and that sorrow is dead which thou wert only called into the world to feel?

It is certain that there is nothing in the idea of a pre-existent state that excites our longing like the prospect of a posthumous existence. We are satisfied to have begun life when we did; we

have no ambition to have set out on our journey sooner; and feel that we have had quite enough to do to battle our way through since. We cannot say,

“The wars we well remember of King Nine,  
Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine.”

Neither have we any wish: we are contented to read of them in story, and to stand and gaze at the vast sea of time that separates us from them. It was early days then: the world was not *well-aired* enough for us: we have no inclination to have been up and stirring. We do not consider the six thousand years of the world before we were born as so much time lost to us: we are perfectly indifferent about the matter. We do not grieve and lament that we did not happen to be in time to see the grand mask and pageant of human life going on in all that period; though we are mortified at being obliged to quit our stand before the rest of the procession passes.

It may be suggested in explanation of this difference, that we know from various records and traditions what happened in the time of Queen Anne, or even in the reigns of the Assyrian monarchs; but that we have no means of ascertaining what is to happen hereafter but by awaiting the event, and that our eagerness and curiosity are sharpened in proportion as we are in the dark about it. This is not at all the case; for at that rate we should be constantly wishing to make a voyage of discovery to Greenland or to the Moon, neither of which we have, in general, the least desire to do. Neither, in truth, have we any particular solicitude to pry into the secrets of futurity, but as a pretext for prolonging our own existence. It is not so much that we care to be alive a hundred or a thousand years hence, any more than to have been alive a hundred or a thousand years ago: but the thing lies here, that we would all of us wish the present moment to last for ever. We would be as we are, and would have the world remain just as it is, to please us.

“The present eye catches the present object”—

to have and to hold while it may; and abhors, on any terms, to have it torn from us, and nothing left in its room. It is the pang of parting, the unloosing our grasp, the breaking asunder some strong tie, the leaving some cherished purpose unfulfilled, that creates the repugnance to go, and “makes calamity of so long life,” as it often is.

— “Oh! thou strong heart!  
There’s such a covenant ’twixt the world and thee,  
They’re loth to break!”

The love of life, then, is an habitual attachment, not an abstract

principle. Simply *to be* does not "content man's natural desire:" we long to be in a certain time, place, and circumstance. We would much rather be now, "on this bank and shoal of time," than have our choice of any future period, than take a slice of fifty or sixty years out of the Millennium, for instance. This shows that our attachment is not confined either to *being* or to *well-being*, but that we have an inveterate prejudice in favour of our immediate existence, such as it is. The mountaineer will not leave his rock, nor the savage his hut; neither are we willing to give up our present mode of life, with all its advantages and disadvantages, for any other that could be substituted for it. No man would, I think, exchange his existence with any other man, however fortunate. We had as lief *not be*, as *not be ourselves*. There are some persons of that reach of soul that they would like to live two hundred and fifty years hence, to see to what height of empire America will have grown up in that period, or whether the English constitution will last so long. These are points beyond me. But I confess I should like to live to see the downfall of the Bourbons. That is a vital question with me; and I shall like it the better the sooner it happens!

No young man ever thinks he shall die. He may believe that others will, or assent to the doctrine that "all men are mortal" as an abstract proposition, but he is far enough from bringing it home to himself individually. Youth, buoyant activity, and animal spirits hold absolute antipathy with old age as well as with death; nor have we, in the heyday of life, any more than in the thoughtlessness of childhood, the remotest conception how

"This sensible warm motion can become  
A kneaded clod"—

nor how sanguine, florid health and vigour shall "turn to withered, weak, and grey." Or if in a moment of idle speculation we indulge in this notion of the close of life as a theory, it is amazing at what a distance it seems; what a long, leisurely interval there is between; what a contrast its slow and solemn approach affords to our present gay dreams of existence! We eye the farthest verge of the horizon, and think what a way we shall have to look back upon ere we arrive at our journey's end; and without our in the least suspecting it, the mists are at our feet, and the shadows of age encompass us. The two divisions of our lives have melted into each other; the extreme points close and meet with none of that romantic interval stretching out between them that we had reckoned upon; and for the rich, melancholy, solemn hues of age, "the sear, the yellow leaf," the deepening shadows of an autumnal evening, we only feel a

dank, cold mist, encircling all objects, after the spirit of youth is fled. There is no inducement to look forward; and what is worse, little interest in looking back to what has become so trite and common. The pleasures of our existence have worn themselves out, are "gone into the wastes of time," or have turned their indifferent side to us: the pains by their repeated blows have worn us out, and have left us neither spirit nor inclination to encounter them again in retrospect. We do not want to rip up old grievances, nor to renew our youth like the phoenix, nor to live our lives twice over. Once is enough. As the tree falls, so let it lie. Shut up the book and close the account once for all!

It has been thought by some that life is like the exploring of a passage that grows narrower and darker the farther we advance, without a possibility of ever turning back, and where we are stifled for want of breath at last. For myself, I do not complain of the greater thickness of the atmosphere as I approach the narrow house. I felt it more, formerly, when the idea alone seemed to suppress a thousand rising hopes and weighed upon the pulses of the blood. At present I rather feel a thinness and want of support, I stretch out my hand to some object and find none, I am too much in a world of abstraction; the naked map of life is spread out before me, and in the emptiness and desolation I see Death coming to meet me. In my youth I could not behold him for the crowd of objects and feelings, and Hope stood always between us, saying, "Never mind that old fellow!" If I had lived indeed, I should not care to die. But I do not like a contract of pleasure broken off unfulfilled, a marriage with joy unconsummated, a promise of happiness rescinded. My public and private hopes have been left a ruin, or remain only to mock me. I would wish them to be re-edified. I should like to see some prospect of good to mankind, such as my life began with. I should like to leave some sterling work behind me. I should like to have some friendly hand to consign me to the grave. On these conditions I am ready, if not willing, to depart. I shall then write on my tomb—GRATEFUL AND CONTENTED! But I have thought and suffered too much to be willing to have thought and suffered in vain.—In looking back, it sometimes appears to me as if I had in a manner slept out my life in a dream or shadow on the side of the hill of knowledge, where I have fed on books, on thoughts, on pictures, and only heard in half-murmurs the trampling of busy feet or the noises of the throng below. Waked out of this dim, twilight existence, and startled with the passing scene, I have felt a wish to descend to the world of realities and join in the chase. But I fear too late, and



that I had better return to my bookish chimeras and indolence once more! *Zanetto, lascia le donne, et studia la matematica.* I will think of it.

It is not wonderful that the contemplation and fear of death become more familiar to us as we approach nearer to it; that life seems to ebb with the decay of blood and youthful spirits; and that as we find everything about us subject to chance and change, as our strength and beauty die, as our hopes and passions, our friends and our affections, leave us, we begin by degrees to feel ourselves mortal!

I have never seen death but once, and that was in an infant. It is years ago. The look was calm and placid, and the face was fair and firm. It was as if a waxen image had been laid out in the coffin, and strewed with innocent flowers. It was not like death, but more like an image of life! No breath moved the lips, no pulse stirred, no sight or sound would enter those eyes or ears more. While I looked at it, I saw no pain was there; it seemed to smile at the short pang of life which was over; but I could not bear the coffin-lid to be closed—it seemed to stifle me; and still as the nettles wave in a corner of the churchyard over his little grave, the welcome breeze helps to refresh me and ease the tightness at my breast.

[I did not see my father after he was dead, but I saw Death shake him by the palsied hand and stare him in the face. He made as good an end as Falstaff; though different, as became him. After repeating the name of his R(edeemer) often, he took my mother's hand, and, looking up, put it in my sister's, and so expired. There was something graceful and gracious in his nature, which showed itself in his last act.]

An ivory or marble image, like Chantry's monument of the two children, is contemplated with pure delight. Why do we not grieve and fret that the marble is not alive, or fancy that it has a shortness of breath? It never was alive; and it is the difficulty of making the transition from life to death, the struggle between the two in our imagination, that confounds their properties painfully together, and makes us conceive that the infant that is but just dead still wants to breathe, to enjoy, and look about it, and is prevented by the icy hand of death locking up its faculties and benumbing its senses; so that, if it could, it would complain of its own hard state. Perhaps religious considerations reconcile the mind to this change sooner than any others, by representing the spirit as fled to another sphere, and leaving the body behind it. So in reflecting on death generally, we mix up the idea of life with it, and thus make it the

ghastly monster it is. We think how we should feel, not how the dead feel.

“ Still from the tomb the voice of nature cries ;  
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires ! ”

There is an admirable passage on this subject in Tucker's “ *Light of Nature Pursued*,” which I shall transcribe, as by much the best illustration I can offer of it :—

“ The melancholy appearance of a lifeless body, the mansion provided for it to inhabit, dark, cold, close, and solitary, are shocking to the imagination ; but it is to the imagination only, not the understanding ; for whoever consults this faculty will see at first glance that there is nothing dismal in all these circumstances ; if the corpse were kept wrapped up in a warm bed, with a roasting fire in the chamber, it would feel no comfortable warmth therefrom ; were store of tapers lighted up as soon as day shuts in, it would see no objects to divert it ; were it left at large it would have no liberty, nor if surrounded with company would be cheered thereby ; neither are the distorted features expressions of pain, uneasiness, or distress. This every one knows, and will readily allow upon being suggested, yet still cannot behold, nor even cast a thought upon those objects without shuddering ; for knowing that a living person must suffer grievously under such appearances, they become habitually formidable to the mind, and strike a mechanical horror, which is increased by the customs of the world around us.”

There is usually one pang added voluntarily and unnecessarily to the fear of death, by our affecting to compassionate the loss which others will have in us. If that were all, we might reasonably set our minds at rest. The pathetic exhortation on country tombstones, “ Grieve not for me, my wife and children dear,” &c., is for the most part speedily followed to the letter. We do not leave so great a void in society as we are inclined to imagine, partly to magnify our own importance, and partly to console ourselves by sympathy. Even in the same family the gap is not so great ; the wound closes up sooner than we should expect. Nay, *our room* is not infrequently thought better than *our company*. People walk along the streets the day after our deaths just as they did before, and the crowd is not diminished. While we were living, the world seemed in a manner to exist only for us, for our delight and amusement, because it contributed to them. But our hearts cease to beat, and it goes on as usual, and thinks no more about us than it did in our lifetime. The million are devoid of sentiment, and care as little for you or me as if we belonged to the moon. We live the week over in the Sunday's paper, or are decently interred in some obituary at the month's

end! It is not surprising that we are forgotten so soon after we quit this mortal stage; we are scarcely noticed while we are on it. It is not merely that our names are not known in China—they have hardly been heard of in the next street. We are hand and glove with the universe, and think the obligation is mutual. This is an evident fallacy. If this, however, does not trouble us now, it will not hereafter. A handful of dust can have no quarrel to pick with its neighbours, or complaint to make against Providence, and might well exclaim, if it had but an understanding and a tongue, "Go thy ways, old world, swing round in blue ether, voluble to every age, you and I shall no more jostle!"

It is amazing how soon the rich and titled, and even some of those who have wielded great political power, are forgotten.

"A little rule, a little sway,  
Is all the great and mighty have  
Betwixt the cradle and the grave"—

and, after its short date, they hardly leave a name behind them. "A great man's memory may, at the common rate, survive him half a year." His heirs and successors take his titles, his power, and his wealth—all that made him considerable or courted by others; and he has left nothing else behind him either to delight or benefit the world. Posterity are not by any means so disinterested as they are supposed to be. They give their gratitude and admiration only in return for benefits conferred. They cherish the memory of those to whom they are indebted for instruction and delight; and they cherish it just in proportion to the instruction and delight they are conscious they receive. The sentiment of admiration springs immediately from this ground, and cannot be otherwise than well founded.

The effeminate clinging to life as such, as a general or abstract idea, is the effect of a highly civilised and artificial state of society. Men formerly plunged into all the vicissitudes and dangers of war, or staked their all upon a single die, or some one passion, which if they could not have gratified, life became a burden to them—now our strongest passion is to think, our chief amusement is to read new plays, new poems, new novels, and this we may do at our leisure, in perfect security, *ad infinitum*. If we look into the old histories and romances, before the *belles-lettres* neutralised human affairs and reduced passion to a state of mental equivocation, we find the heroes and heroines not setting their lives "at a pin's fee," but rather courting opportunities of throwing them away in very wantonness of spirit. They raise their fondness for some favourite pursuit to its height, to a pitch of madness, and think no price too dear to pay for its full gratification. Everything else

is dross. They go to death as to a bridal bed, and sacrifice themselves or others without remorse at the shrine of love, of honour, of religion, or any other prevailing feeling. Romeo runs his "sea-sick, weary bark upon the rocks" of death the instant he finds himself deprived of his Juliet; and she clasps his neck in their last agonies, and follows him to the same fatal shore. One strong idea takes possession of the mind and overrules every other; and even life itself, joyless without that, becomes an object of indifference or loathing. There is at least more of imagination in such a state of things, more vigour of feeling and promptitude to act than in our lingering, languid, protracted attachment to life for its own poor sake. It is, perhaps, also better, as well as more heroical, to strike at some daring or darling object, and if we fail in that, to take the consequences manfully, than to renew the lease of a tedious, spiritless, charmless existence, merely (as Pierre says) "to lose it afterwards in some vile brawl" for some worthless object. Was there not a spirit of martyrdom as well as a spice of the reckless energy of barbarism in this bold defiance of death? Had not religion something to do with it; the implicit belief in a future life, which rendered this of less value, and embodied something beyond it to the imagination; so that the rough soldier, the infatuated lover, the valorous knight, &c., could afford to throw away the present venture, and take a leap into the arms of futurity, which the modern sceptic shrinks back from, with all his boasted reason and vain philosophy, weaker than a woman! I cannot help thinking so myself; but I have endeavoured to explain this point before, and will not enlarge further on it here.

A life of action and danger moderates the dread of death. It not only gives us fortitude to bear pain, but teaches us at every step the precarious tenure on which we hold our present being. Sedentary and studious men are the most apprehensive on this score. Dr. Johnson was an instance in point. A few years seemed to him soon over, compared with those sweeping contemplations on time and infinity with which he had been used to pose himself. In the *still-life* of a man of letters there was no obvious reason for a change. He might sit in an arm-chair and pour out cups of tea to all eternity. Would it had been possible for him to do so! The most rational cure, after all, for the inordinate fear of death is to set a just value on life. If we merely wish to continue on the scene to indulge our headstrong humours and tormenting passions, we had better begone at once: and if we only cherish a fondness for existence according to the good we derive from it, the pang we feel at parting with it will not be very severe!

## THE FIGHT.

[This Essay first appeared in *The New Monthly Magazine* in 1822. It was reprinted in *Hazlitt's Literary Remains*, 1836, and again in the third Edition of *Table-Talk*, edited by his son, 1845.]

———"The *fight*, the *fight's* the thing,  
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king."

*Where there's a will, there's a way.*—I said so to myself, as I walked down Chancery Lane, about half-past six o'clock on Monday the 10th of December, to inquire at Jack Randall's where the fight the next day was to be; and I found the proverb nothing "musty" in the present instance. I was determined to see this fight, come what would, and see it I did in great style. It was my *first fight*, yet it more than answered my expectations. . . .

I was going down Chancery Lane, thinking to ask at Jack Randall's where the fight was to be, when, looking through the glass-door of the Hole in the Wall, I heard a gentleman asking the same question at Mrs. Randall, as the author of "*Waverley*" would express it. Now Mrs. Randall stood answering the gentleman's question, with all the authenticity of the Lady of the Champion of the Light Weights. Thinks I, I'll wait till this person comes out, and learn from him how it is. For, to say a truth, I was not fond of going into this house-of-call for heroes and philosophers, ever since the owner of it (for Jack is no gentleman) threatened once upon a time to kick me out of doors for wanting a mutton-chop at his hospitable board, when the conqueror in thirteen battles was more full of *blue ruin* than of good manners. I was the more mortified at this repulse, inasmuch as I heard Mr. James Simpkins, hosier in the Strand, one day when the character of the Hole in the Wall was brought in question, observe, "The house is a very good house, and the company quite genteel: I have been there myself!" Remembering this unkind treatment of mine host, to which mine hostess was also a party, and not wishing to put her in unquiet thoughts at a time jubilant like the present, I waited at the door, when who should issue forth but my friend Joe P——s, and seeing him turn suddenly up Chancery Lane with that quick jerk and impatient stride which distinguish a lover of the FANCY, I said, "I'll be hanged if that fellow is not going to the fight, and is on his way to get me to go with him." So it proved in effect, and we agreed to adjourn to my lodgings to discuss measures with that cordiality

which makes old friends like new, and new friends like old, on great occasions. We are cold to others only when we are dull in ourselves, and have neither thoughts nor feelings to impart to them. Give a man a topic in his head, a throb of pleasure in his heart, and he will be glad to share it with the first person he meets. Joe and I, though we seldom meet, were an *alter idem* on this memorable occasion, and had not an idea that we did not candidly impart; and "so carelessly did we fleet the time," that I wish no better, when there is another fight, than to have him for a companion on my journey down, and to return with my friend Jack Pigott, talking of what was to happen or of what did happen, with a noble subject always at hand, and liberty to digress to others whenever they offered. Indeed, on my repeating the lines from Spenser in an involuntary fit of enthusiasm,

"What more felicity can fall to creature,  
Than to enjoy delight with liberty?"

my last-named ingenious friend stopped me by saying that this, translated into the vulgate, meant "*Going to see a fight.*"

Joe and I could not settle about the method of going down. He said there was a caravan, he understood, to start from Tom Belcher's at two, which would go there *right out* and back again the next day. Now, I never travel all night, and said I should get a cast to Newbury by one of the mails. Joe swore the thing was impossible, and I could only answer that I had made up my mind to it. In short, he seemed to me to waver, said he only came to see if I was going, had letters to write, a cause coming on the day after, and faintly said at parting (for I was bent on setting out that moment), "Well, we meet at Philippi?" I made the best of my way to Piccadilly. The mail-coach stand was bare. "They are all gone," said I; "this is always the way with me—in the instant I lose the future—if I had not stayed to pour out that last cup of tea, I should have been just in time;"—and cursing my folly and ill-luck together, without inquiring at the coach-office whether the mails were gone or not, I walked on in despite, and to punish my own dilatoriness and want of determination. At any rate, I would not turn back: I might get to Hounslow, or perhaps farther, to be on my road the next morning. I passed Hyde park corner (my Rubicon), and trusted to fortune. Suddenly I heard the clattering of a Brentford stage, and the fight rushed full upon my fancy. I argued (not unwisely) that even a Brentford coachman was better company than my own thoughts (such as they were just then), and at his invitation mounted the box with him. I immediately stated my case to

him—namely, my quarrel with myself for missing the Bath-or Bristol mail, and my determination to get on in consequence as well as I could, without any disparagement or insulting comparison between longer or shorter stages. It is a maxim with me that stage-coaches, and consequently stage-coachmen, are respectable in proportion to the distance they have to travel: so I said nothing on that subject to my Brentford friend. Any incipient tendency to an abstract proposition, or (as he might have construed it) to a personal reflection of this kind, was, however, nipped in the bud; for I had no sooner declared indignantly that I had missed the mails, than he flatly denied that they were gone along, and lo! at the instant three of them drove by in rapid, provoking, orderly succession, as if they would devour the ground before them. Here again I seemed in the contradictory situation of the man in Dryden who exclaims,

“I follow Fate, which does too hard pursue!”

If I had stopped to inquire at the White Horse Cellar, which would not have taken me a minute, I should now have been driving down the road in all the dignified unconcern and *ideal* perfection of mechanical conveyance. The Bath mail I had set my mind upon, and I had missed it, as I miss everything else, by my own absurdity, in putting the will for the deed, and aiming at ends without employing means. “Sir,” said he of the Brentford, “the Bath mail will be up presently; my brother-in-law drives it, and I will engage to stop him if there is a place empty.” I almost doubted my good genius; but, sure enough, up it drove like lightning, and stopped directly at the call of the Brentford Jehu. I would not have believed this possible, but the brother-in-law of a mail-coach driver is himself no mean man. I was transferred without loss of time from the top of one coach to that of the other, desired the guard to pay my fare to the Brentford coachman for me, as I had no change, was accommodated with a greatcoat, put up my umbrella to keep off a drizzling mist, and we began to cut through the air like an arrow. The milestones disappeared one after another, the rain kept off; Tom Turtle<sup>1</sup> the trainer sat before me on the coach-box, with whom I exchanged civilities as a gentleman going to the fight: the passion that had transported me an hour before was subdued to pensive regret and conjectural musing on the next day’s battle; I was promised a place inside at Reading, and upon the whole I thought myself a lucky fellow. Such is the force of imagination! On the outside of any other coach on the 10th of December, with a Scotch

<sup>1</sup> John Thurtell, to wit.

mist drizzling through the cloudy moonlight air, I should have been cold, comfortless, impatient, and, no doubt, wet through; but seated on the Royal-mail, I felt warm and comfortable; the air did me good, the ride did me good, I was pleased with the progress we had made, and confident that all would go well through the journey. When I got inside at Reading, I found Turtle and a stout valetudinarian, whose costume bespoke him one of the FANCY, and who had risen from a three months' sick-bed to get into the mail to see the fight. They were intimate, and we fell into a lively discourse. My friend the trainer was confined in his topics to fighting dogs and men, to bears and badgers; beyond this he was "quite chapfallen," not a word to throw at a dog, or indeed very wisely fell asleep, when any other game was started. The whole art of training (I, however, learnt from him) consists in two things, exercise and abstinence, abstinence and exercise, repeated alternately and without end. A yolk of an egg with a spoonful of rum in it is the first thing in a morning, and then a walk of six miles till breakfast. This meal consists of a plentiful supply of tea and toast and beefsteaks. Then another six or seven miles till dinner-time, and another supply of solid beef or mutton with a pint of porter, and perhaps, at the utmost, a couple of glasses of sherry. Martin trains on water, but this increases his infirmity on another very dangerous side. The Gas-man takes now and then a chirping glass (under the rose) to console him, during a six weeks' probation, for the absence of Mrs. Hickman—an agreeable woman, with (I understand) a pretty fortune of two hundred pounds. How matter presses on me! What stubborn things are facts! How inexhaustible is nature and art! "It is well," as I once heard Mr. Richmond observe, "to see a variety." He was speaking of cock-fighting as an edifying spectacle. I cannot deny but that one learns more of what *is* (I do not say of what *ought to be*) in this desultory mode of practical study than from reading the same book twice over, even though it should be a moral treatise. Where was I? I was sitting at dinner with the candidate for the honours of the ring, "where good digestion waits on appetite, and health on both." Then follows an hour of social chat and native glee; and afterwards, to another breathing over heathy hill or dale. Back to supper, and then to bed, and up by six again—our hero

"Follows so the ever-running sun,  
With profitable *ardour*"—

to the day that brings him victory or defeat in the green fairy circle. Is not this life more sweet than mine? I was going to say; but I will not libel any life by comparing it to mine, which is (at



the date of these presents) bitter as coloquintida and the dregs of aconitum!

The invalid in the Bath mail soared a pitch above the trainer, and did not sleep so sound, because he had "more figures and more fantasies." We talked the hours away merrily. He had faith in surgery, for he had three ribs set right, that had been broken in a *turn-up* at Belcher's, but thought physicians old women, for they had no antidote in their catalogue for brandy. An indigestion is an excellent commonplace for two people that never met before. By way of ingratiating myself, I told him the story of my doctor, who, on my earnestly representing to him that I thought his regimen had done me harm, assured me that the whole pharmacopœia contained nothing comparable to the prescription he had given me; and, as a proof of its undoubted efficacy, said that "he had had one gentleman with my complaint under his hands for the last fifteen years." This anecdote made my companion shake the rough sides of his three greatcoats with boisterous laughter; and Turtle, starting out of his sleep, swore he knew how the fight would go, for he had had a dream about it. Sure enough, the rascal told us how the three first rounds went off, but "his dream," like others, "denoted a foregone conclusion." He knew his men. The moon now rose in silver state, and I ventured, with some hesitation, to point out this object of placid beauty, with the blue serene beyond, to the man of science, to which his ear he "seriously inclined," the more as it gave promise *d'un beau jour* for the morrow, and showed the ring undrenched by envious showers, arrayed in sunny smiles. Just then, all going on well, I thought on my friend Joe, whom I had left behind, and said innocently, "There was a blockhead of a fellow I left in town, who said there was no possibility of getting down by the mail, and talked of going by a caravan from Belcher's at two in the morning, after he had written some letters."—"Why," said he of the lapels, "I should not wonder if that was the very person we saw running about like mad from one coach-door to another, and asking if any one had seen a friend of his, a gentleman going to the fight, whom he had missed stupidly enough by staying to write a note."—"Pray, sir," said my fellow-traveller, "had he a plaid-cloak on?"—"Why, no," said I, "not at the time I left him, but he very well might afterwards, for he offered to lend me one." The plaid-cloak and the letter decided the thing. Joe, sure enough, was in the Bristol mail, which preceded us by about fifty yards. This was droll enough. We had now but a few miles to our place of destination, and the first thing I did on alighting at Newbury, both coaches stopping at the same time, was to call out, "Pray, is there a gentleman in that

mail of the name of P——s?"—"No," said Joe, borrowing something of the vein of Gilpin, "for I have just got out."—"Well!" says he, "this is lucky; but you don't know how vexed I was to miss you; for," added he, lowering his voice, "do you know, when I left you I went to Belcher's to ask about the caravan, and Mrs. Belcher said, very obligingly, she couldn't tell about that, but there were two gentlemen who had taken places by the mail and were gone on in a landau, and she could frank us. It's a pity I didn't meet with you; we could then have got down for nothing. But *mum's the word*." It's the devil for any one to tell me a secret, for it is sure to come out in print. I do not care so much to gratify a friend, but the public ear is too great a temptation to me.

Our present business was to get beds and supper at an inn; but this was no easy task. The public-houses were full, and where you saw a light at a private house, and people poking their heads out of the casement to see what was going on, they instantly put them in and shut the window, the moment you seemed advancing with a suspicious overture for accommodation. Our guard and coachman thundered away at the outer gate of the Crown for some time without effect—such was the greater noise within; and when the doors were unbarred and we got admittance, we found a party assembled in the kitchen round a good hospitable fire, some sleeping, others drinking, others talking on politics and on the fight. A tall English yeoman (something like Matthews in the face, and quite as great a wag)—

"A lusty man to ben an abbot able"—

was making such a prodigious noise about rent and taxes, and the price of corn now and formerly, that he had prevented us from being heard at the gate. The first thing I heard him say was to a shuffling fellow who wanted to be off a bet for a shilling glass of brandy and water—"Confound it, man, don't be *insipid*!" Thinks I, that is a good phrase. It was a good omen. He kept it up so all night, nor flinched with the approach of morning. He was a fine fellow, with sense, wit, and spirit, a hearty body and a joyous mind, free-spoken, frank, convivial—one of that true English breed that went with Harry the Fifth to the siege of Harfleur—"standing like greyhounds in the slips," &c. We ordered tea and eggs (beds were soon found to be out of the question), and this fellow's conversation was *sauce piquante*. It did one's heart good to see him brandish his oaken towel and to hear him talk. He made mince-meat of a drunken, stupid, red-faced, quarrelsome, frowsy farmer, whose nose "he moralised into a thousand smiles," making it out a firebrand like Bar-

dolph's. "I'll tell you what, my friend," says he, "the landlady has only to keep you here to save fire and candle. If one was to touch your nose, it would go off like a piece of charcoal." At this the other only grinned like an idiot, the sole variety in his purple face being his little peering grey eyes and yellow teeth; called for another glass, swore he would not stand it; and after many attempts to provoke his humorous antagonist to single combat, which the other turned off (after working him up to a ludicrous pitch of choler) with great adroitness, he fell quietly asleep with a glass of liquor in his hand, which he could not lift to his head. His laughing persecutor made a speech over him, and turning to the opposite side of the room, where they were all sleeping in the midst of this "loud and furious fun," said, "There's a scene, by G—d! for Hogarth to paint. I think he and Shakspeare were our two best men at copying life." This confirmed me in my good opinion of him. Hogarth, Shakspeare, and Nature were just enough for him (indeed for any man) to know. I said, "You read Cobbett, don't you? At least," says I, "you talk just as well as he writes." He seemed to doubt this. But I said, "We have an hour to spare; if you'll get pen, ink, and paper, and keep on talking, I'll write down what you say; and if it doesn't make a capital 'Political Register,' I'll forfeit my head. You have kept me alive to-night, however. I don't know what I should have done without you." He did not dislike this view of the thing, nor my asking if he was not about the size of Jem Belcher; and told me soon afterwards, in the confidence of friendship, that "the circumstance which had given him nearly the greatest concern in his life was Cribb's beating Jem after he had lost his eye by racket-playing."—The morning dawns; that dim but yet clear light appears, which weighs like solid bars of metal on the sleepless eyelids; the guests dropped down from their chambers one by one—but it was too late to think of going to bed now (the clock was on the stroke of seven); we had nothing for it but to find a barber's (the pole that glittered in the morning sun lighted us to his shop), and then a nine miles' march to Hungerford. The day was fine, the sky was blue, the mists retiring from the marshy ground, the path was tolerably dry, the sitting-up all night had not done us much harm—at least the cause was good; we talked of this and that with amicable difference, roving and sipping of many subjects, but still invariably we returned to the fight. At length, a mile to the left of Hungerford, on a gentle eminence, we saw the ring, surrounded by covered carts, gigs, and carriages, of which hundreds had passed us on the road; Joe gave a youthful shout, and we hastened down a narrow lane to the scene of action.

Reader, have you ever seen a fight? If not, you have a pleasure to come, at least if it is a fight like that between the Gas-man and Bill Neate. The crowd was very great when we arrived on the spot; open carriages were coming up, with streamers flying and music playing, and the country-people were pouring in over hedge and ditch in all directions, to see their hero beat or be beaten. The odds were still on Gas, but only about five to four. Gully had been down to try Neate, and had backed him considerably, which was a damper to the sanguine confidence of the adverse party. About £200,000 were pending. Gas says he has lost £3000, which were promised him by different gentlemen if he had won. He had presumed too much on himself, which had made others presume on him. This spirited and formidable young fellow seems to have taken for his motto the old maxim, that "there are three things necessary to success in life—*Impudence! Impudence! Impudence!*" It is so in matters of opinion, but not in the FANCY, which is the most practical of all things, though even here confidence is half the battle, but only half. Our friend had vapoured and swaggered too much, as if he wanted to grin and bully his adversary out of the fight. "Alas! the Bristol man was not so tamed!"—"This is the *gravedigger*" (would Tom Hickman exclaim in the moments of intoxication from gin and success, showing his tremendous right hand); "this will send many of them to their long homes; I haven't done with them yet!" Why should he—though he had licked four of the best men within the hour—why should he threaten to inflict dishonourable chastisement on my old master Richmond, a veteran going off the stage, and who has borne his sable honours meekly? Magnanimity, my dear Tom, and bravery should be inseparable. Or why should he go up to his antagonist, the first time he ever saw him at the Fives-court, and measuring him from head to foot with a glance of contempt, as Achilles surveyed Hector, say to him, "What, are you Bill Neate? I'll knock more blood out of that great carcass of thine, this day fortnight, than you ever knocked out of a bullock's!" It was not manly,—'twas not fighter-like. If he was sure of the victory (as he was not), the less said about it the better. Modesty should accompany the FANCY as its shadow. The best men were always the best behaved. Jem Belcher, the Game Chicken (before whom the Gas-man could not have lived), were civil, silent men. So is Cribb; so is Tom Belcher, the most elegant of sparrers, and not a man for every one to take by the nose. I enlarged on this topic in the mail (while Turtle was asleep), and said very wisely (as I thought) that impertinence was a part of no profession. A boxer was bound to beat his man, but not to thrust his

fist, either actually or by implication, in every one's face. Even a highwayman, in the way of trade, may blow out your brains, but if he uses foul language at the same time, I should say he was no gentleman. A boxer, I would infer, need not be a blackguard or a coxcomb, more than another. Perhaps I press this point too much on a fallen man—Mr. Thomas Hickman has by this time learnt that first of all lessons, "That man was made to mourn." He has lost nothing by the late fight but his presumption; and that every man may do as well without! By an over-display of this quality, however, the public had been prejudiced against him, and the *knowing ones* were taken in. Few but those who had bet on him wished Gas to win. With my own prepossessions on the subject, the result of the 11th of December appeared to me as fine a piece of poetical justice as I had ever witnessed. The difference of weight between the two combatants (fourteen stone to twelve) was nothing to the sporting men. Great, heavy, clumsy, long-armed Bill Neate kicked the beam in the scale of the Gas-man's vanity. The amateurs were frightened at his big words, and thought they would make up for the difference of six feet and five feet nine. Truly, the FANCY are not men of imagination. They judge of what has been, and cannot conceive of anything that is to be. The Gas-man had won hitherto; therefore he must beat a man half as big again as himself—and that to a certainty. Besides, there are as many feuds, factions, prejudices, pedantic notions, in the FANCY as in the State or in the schools. Mr. Gully is almost the only cool, sensible man among them, who exercises an unbiassed discretion, and is not a slave to his passions in these matters. But enough of reflections, and to our tale. The day, as I have said, was fine for a December morning. The grass was wet and the ground miry, and ploughed up with multitudinous feet, except that, within the ring itself, there was a spot of virgin-green, closed in and unprofaned by vulgar tread, that shone with dazzling brightness in the midday sun. For it was now noon, and we had an hour to wait. This is the trying time. It is then the heart sickens, as you think what the two champions are about, and how short a time will determine their fate. After the first blow is struck there is no opportunity for nervous apprehensions; you are swallowed up in the immediate interest of the scene—but

" Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream."

I found it so as I felt the sun's rays clinging to my back, and

saw the white wintry clouds sink below the verge of the horizon. "So," I thought, "my fairest hopes have faded from my sight!—so will the Gas-man's glory, or that of his adversary, vanish in an hour." The *swells* were parading in their white box-coats, the outer ring was cleared with some bruises on the heads and shins of the rustic assembly (for the *Cockneys* had been distanced by the sixty-six miles); the time drew near; I had got a good stand; a bustle, a buzz, ran through the crowd; and from the opposite side entered Neate, between his second and bottle-holder. He rolled along, swathed in his loose greatcoat, his knock-knees bending under his huge bulk; and, with a modest, cheerful air, threw his hat into the ring. He then just looked round, and begun quietly to undress; when from the other side there was a similar rush and an opening made, and the Gas-man came forward with a conscious air of anticipated triumph, too much like the cock-of-the-walk. He strutted about more than became a hero, sucked oranges with a supercilious air, and threw away the skin with a toss of his head, and went up and looked at Neate, which was an act of supererogation. The only sensible thing he did was, as he strode away from the modern Ajax, to fling out his arms, as if he wanted to try whether they would do their work that day. By this time they had stripped, and presented a strong contrast in appearance. If Neate was like Ajax, "with Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear" the pugilistic reputation of all Bristol, Hickman might be compared to Diomed, light, vigorous, elastic, and his back glistened in the sun, as he moved about, like a panther's hide. There was now a dead pause—attention was awe-struck. Who at that moment, big with a great event, did not draw his breath short—did not feel his heart throb? All was ready. They tossed up for the sun, and the Gas-man won. They were led up to the *scratch*—shook hands, and went at it.

In the first round every one thought it was all over. After making play a short time, the Gas-man flew at his adversary like a tiger, struck five blows in as many seconds, three first, and then following him as he staggered back, two more, right and left, and down he fell, a mighty ruin. There was a shout, and I said, "There is no standing this." Neate seemed like a lifeless lump of flesh and bone, round which the Gas-man's blows played with the rapidity of electricity or lightning, and you imagined he would only be lifted up to be knocked down again. It was as if Hickman held a sword or a fire in that right hand of his, and directed it against an unarmed body. They met again, and Neate seemed, not cowed, but particularly cautious. I saw his teeth clenched together and his brows knit close against the sun. He held out both his arms

at full length straight before him, like two sledgehammers, and raised his left an inch or two higher. The Gas-man could not get over this guard—they struck mutually and fell, but without advantage on either side. It was the same in the next round; but the balance of power was thus restored—the fate of the battle was suspended. No one could tell how it would end. This was the only moment in which opinion was divided; for, in the next, the Gas-man aiming a mortal blow at his adversary's neck with his right hand, and failing from the length he had to reach, the other returned it with his left at full swing, planted a tremendous blow on his cheek-bone and eyebrow, and made a red ruin of that side of his face. The Gas-man went down, and there was another shout—a roar of triumph as the waves of fortune rolled tumultuously from side to side. This was a settler. Hickman got up, and “grinned horrible a ghastly smile,” yet he was evidently dashed in his opinion of himself; it was the first time he had ever been so punished; all one side of his face was perfect scarlet, and his right eye was closed in dingy blackness, as he advanced to the fight, less confident, but still determined. After one or two rounds, not receiving another such remembrancer, he rallied and went at it with his former impetuosity. But in vain. His strength had been weakened,—his blows could not tell at such a distance,—he was obliged to fling himself at his adversary, and could not strike from his feet; and almost as regularly as he flew at him with his right hand, Neate warded the blow, or drew back out of its reach, and felled him with the return of his left. There was little cautious sparring—no half-hits—no tapping and trifling, none of the *petit-maitreship* of the art—they were almost all knock-down blows: the fight was a good stand-up fight. The wonder was the half-minute time. If there had been a minute or more allowed between each round, it would have been intelligible how they should by degrees recover strength and resolution; but to see two men smashed to the ground, smeared with gore, stunned, senseless, the breath beaten out of their bodies; and then, before you recover from the shock, to see them rise up with new strength and courage, stand ready to inflict or receive mortal offence, and rush upon each other “like two clouds over the Caspian”—this is the most astonishing thing of all: this is the high and heroic state of man! From this time forward the event became more certain every round; and about the twelfth it seemed as if it must have been over. Hickman generally stood with his back to me; but in the scuffle he had changed positions, and Neate just then made a tremendous lunge at him, and hit him full in the face. It was doubtful whether he would fall backwards or

forwards; he hung suspended for a minute or two, and then fell back, throwing his hands in the air, and with his face lifted up to the sky. I never saw anything more terrific than his aspect just before he fell. All traces of life, of natural expression, were gone from him. His face was like a human skull, a death's-head spouting blood. The eyes were filled with blood, the nose streamed with blood, the mouth gaped blood. He was not like an actual man, but like a preternatural, spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante's "Inferno." Yet he fought on after this for several rounds, still striking the first desperate blow, and Neate standing on the defensive, and using the same cautious guard to the last, as if he had still all his work to do; and it was not till the Gas-man was so stunned in the seventeenth or eighteenth round that his senses forsook him, and he could not come to time, that the battle was declared over. Ye who despise the FANCY, do something to show as much pluck or as much self-possession as this, before you assume a superiority which you have never given a single proof of by any one action in the whole course of your lives!—When the Gas-man came to himself, the first words he uttered were, "Where am I? What is the matter?"—"Nothing is the matter, Tom,—you have lost the battle, but you are the bravest man alive." And Jackson whispered to him, "I am collecting a purse for you, Tom."—Vain sounds, and unheard at that moment! Neate instantly went up and shook him cordially by the hand, and seeing some old acquaintance, began to flourish with his fists, calling out, "Ah! you always said I couldn't fight—what do you think now?" But all in good-humour, and without any appearance of arrogance; only it was evident Bill Neate was pleased that he had won the fight. When it was over, I asked Cribb if he did not think it was a good one. He said, "*Pretty well!*" The carrier-pigeons now mounted into the air, and one of them flew with the news of her husband's victory to the bosom of Mrs. Neate. Alas for Mrs. Hickman!

*Mais au revoir*, as Sir Fopling Flutter says. I went down with Joe P—s; I returned with Jack Pigott, whom I met on the ground. Tom's is a rattle-brain; Pigott is a sentimentalist. Now, under favour, I am a sentimentalist too—therefore I say nothing, but that the interest of the excursion did not flag as I came back. Pigott and I marched along the causeway leading from Hungerford to Newbury, now observing the effect of a brilliant sun on the tawny meads or moss-coloured cottages, now exulting in the fight, now digressing to some topic of general and elegant literature. My friend was dressed in character for the occasion, or like one of the FANCY; that is, with a double portion of greatcoats,



clogs, and overhauls; and just as we had agreed with a couple of country-lads to carry his superfluous wearing-apparel to the next town, we were overtaken by a return post-chaise, into which I got, Pigott preferring a seat on the bar. There were two strangers already in the chaise, and on their observing they supposed I had been to the fight, I said I had, and concluded they had done the same. They appeared, however, a little shy and sore on the subject; and it was not till after several hints dropped and questions put, that it turned out that they had missed it. One of these friends had undertaken to drive the other there in his gig: they had set out, to make sure work, the day before at three in the afternoon. The owner of the one-horse vehicle scorned to ask his way, and drove right on to Bagshot, instead of turning off at Hounslow: there they stopped all night, and set off the next day across the country to Reading, from whence they took coach, and got down within a mile or two of Hungerford, just half-an-hour after the fight was over. This might be safely set down as one of the miseries of human life. We parted with these two gentlemen who had been to see the fight, but had returned as they went, at Wolsingham, where we were promised beds (an irresistible temptation, for Pigott had passed the preceding night at Hungerford as we had done at Newbury), and we turned into an old bow-windowed parlour with a carpet and a snug fire; and after devouring a quantity of tea, toast, and eggs, sat down to consider, during an hour of philosophic leisure, what we should have for supper. In the midst of an Epicurean deliberation between a roasted fowl and mutton-chops with mashed potatoes, we were interrupted by an inroad of Goths and Vandals—*O procul este profani*—not real flash-men, but interlopers, noisy pretenders, butchers from Tothill-fields, brokers from Whitechapel, who called immediately for pipes and tobacco, hoping it would not be disagreeable to the gentlemen, and began to insist that it was *a cross*. Pigott withdrew from the smoke and noise into another room, and left me to dispute the point with them for a couple of hours *sans intermission* by the dial. The next morning we rose refreshed; and on observing that Jack had a pocket volume in his hand, in which he read in the intervals of our discourse, I inquired what it was, and learned, to my particular satisfaction, that it was a volume of the “New Eloise.” Ladies, after this, will you contend that a love for the FANCY is incompatible with the cultivation of sentiment?—We jogged on as before, my friend setting me up in a genteel drab greatcoat and green silk handkerchief (which I must say became me exceedingly), and after stretching our legs for a few miles, and

seeing Jack Randall, Ned Turner, and Scroggins pass on the top of one of the Bath coaches, we engaged with the driver of the second to take us to London for the usual fee. I got inside, and found three other passengers. One of them was an old gentleman with an aquiline nose, powdered hair, and a pigtail, and who looked as if he had played many a rubber at the Bath rooms. I said to myself, "He is very like Mr. Windham; I wish he would enter into conversation, that I might hear what fine observations would come from those finely-turned features." However, nothing passed, till, stopping to dine at Reading, some inquiry was made by the company about the fight, and I gave (as the reader may believe) an eloquent and animated description of it. When we got into the coach again, the old gentleman, after a graceful exordium, said he had, when a boy, been to a fight between the famous Broughton and George Stevenson, who was called the *Fighting Coachman*, in the year 1770, with the late Mr. Windham. This beginning flattered the spirit of prophecy within me, and riveted my attention. He went on—"George Stevenson was coachman to a friend of my father's. He was an old man when I saw him some years afterwards. He took hold of his own arm and said, 'There was muscle here once, but now it is no more than this young gentleman's.' He added, 'Well, no matter; I have been here long; I am willing to go hence, and I hope I have done no more harm than another man.' Once," said my unknown companion, "I asked him if he had ever beat Broughton. He said Yes; that he had fought with him three times, and the last time he fairly beat him, though the world did not allow it. 'I'll tell you how it was, master. When the seconds lifted us up in the last round, we were so exhausted that neither of us could stand, and we fell upon one another, and as Master Broughton fell uppermost, the mob gave it in his favour, and he was said to have won the battle. But the fact was, that as his second (John Cuthbert) lifted him up, and said to him, 'I'll fight no more, I've had enough;' which," says Stevenson, "you know, gave me the victory. And to prove to you that this was the case, when John Cuthbert was on his deathbed, and they asked him if there was anything on his mind which he wished to confess, he answered, 'Yes; that there was one thing he wished to set right, for that certainly Master Stevenson won the last fight with Master Broughton; for he whispered him as he lifted him up in the last round of all, that he had had enough.'" This," said the Bath gentleman, "was a bit of human nature;" and I have written this account of the fight on purpose that it might not be lost to the world. He also

stated as a proof of the candour of mind in this class of men, that Stevenson acknowledged that Broughton could have beat him in his best day; but that he (Broughton) was getting old in their last rencounter. When we stopped in Piccadilly, I wanted to ask the gentleman some questions about the late Mr. Windham, but had not courage. I got out, resigned my coat and green silk handkerchief to Pigott (loth to part with these ornaments of life), and walked home in high spirits.

P.S.—Joe called upon me the next day, to ask me if I did not think the fight was a complete thing. I said I thought it was. I hope he will relish my account of it.

## ON THE CONDUCT OF LIFE; OR, ADVICE TO A SCHOOLBOY.<sup>1</sup>

[This paper appeared in a Paris Edition of *Table-Talk*, 1825. It was printed in the *Literary Remains*, 1836; and in the third Edition of *Table-Talk*, edited by his son, 1846. It is one of the most pleasing of his compositions, written with much earnestness and feeling, and in an unadorned style. The pages relating to love and marriage are omitted. Of all able writers, Hazlitt had the least knowledge of the female character. It is a subject on which he seldom ventures, and never successfully.]

MY DEAR LITTLE FELLOW,—You are now going to settle at school, and may consider this as your first entrance into the world. As my health is so indifferent, and I may not be with you long, I wish to leave you some advice (the best I can) for your conduct in life, both that it may be of use to you, and as something to remember me by. I may at least be able to caution you against my own errors, if nothing else.

As we went along to your new place of destination, you often repeated that “you durst say they were a set of stupid, disagreeable people,” meaning the people at the school. You were to blame in this. It is a good old rule to hope for the best. Always, my dear,

<sup>1</sup> His son, William Hazlitt, Registrar of the London Bankruptcy Court, now in his eightieth year [1889]. He is known as an author by his translations of “The Life of Luther,” Michelet’s “Roman Republic,” Guizot’s “History of Civilisation,” and “The English Revolution,” Thierry’s “Conquest of England by the Normans,” &c. He wrote a continuation of Johnson’s “Lives of the Poets,” and edited the first reprints of his father’s works, as well as Cotton’s *Montaigne*, and a selection of Defoe’s works.

believe things to be right, till you find them the contrary; and even then, instead of irritating yourself against them, endeavour to put up with them as well as you can, if you cannot alter them. You said "you were sure you should not like the school where you were going." This was wrong. What you meant was, that you did not like to leave home. But you could not tell whether you should like the school or not till you had given it a trial. Otherwise, your saying that you should not like it was determining that you would not like it. Never anticipate evils, or, because you cannot have things exactly as you wish, make them out worse than they are, through mere spite and wilfulness.

You seemed at first to take no notice of your schoolfellows, or rather to set yourself against them, because they were strangers to you. They knew as little of you as you did of them; so that this would have been a reason for their keeping aloof from you as well, which you would have felt as a hardship. Learn never to conceive a prejudice against others because you know nothing of them. It is bad reasoning, and makes enemies of half the world. Do not think ill of them till they behave ill to you; and then strive to avoid the faults which you see in them. This will disarm their hostility sooner than pique or resentment or complaint.

I thought you were disposed to criticise the dress of some of the boys as not so good as your own. Never despise any one for anything that he cannot help—least of all, for his poverty. I would wish you to keep up appearances yourself as a defence against the idle sneers of the world, but I would not have you value yourself upon them. I hope you will neither be the dupe nor victim of vulgar prejudices. Instead of saying above, "Never despise any one for anything that he cannot help," I might have said, "Never despise any one at all;" for contempt implies a triumph over and pleasure in the ill of another. It means that you are glad and congratulate yourself on their failings or misfortunes. The sense of inferiority in others, without this indirect appeal to our self-love, is a painful feeling and not an exulting one.

You complain since, that the boys laugh at you and do not care about you, and that you are not treated as you were at home. My dear, that is one chief reason for your being sent to school, to inure you betimes to the unavoidable rubs and uncertain reception you may meet with in life. You cannot always be with me, and perhaps it is as well that you cannot. But you must not expect others to show the same concern about you as I should. You have hitherto been a spoiled child, and have been used to have your own way a good deal, both in the house and among your playfellows, with whom

you were too fond of being a leader ; but you have good-nature and good sense, and will get the better of this in time. You have now got among other boys who are your equals, or bigger and stronger than yourself, and who have something else to attend to besides humouring your whims and fancies, and you feel this as a repulse or piece of injustice. But the first lesson to learn is, that there are other people in the world besides yourself. There are a number of boys in the school where you are, whose amusements and pursuits (whatever they may be) are and ought to be of as much consequence to them as yours can be to you, and to which, therefore, you must give way in your turn. The more airs of childish self-importance you give yourself, you will only expose yourself to be the more thwarted and laughed at. True equality is the only true morality or true wisdom. Remember always that you are but one among others, and you can hardly mistake your place in society. In your father's house you might do as you pleased ; in the world you will find competitors at every turn. You are not born a king's son, to destroy or dictate to millions ; you can only expect to share their fate, or settle your differences amicably with them. You already find it so at school ; and I wish you to be reconciled to your situation as soon and with as little pain as you can.

It was my misfortune (perhaps) to be bred up among Dissenters, who look with too jaundiced an eye at others, and set too high a value on their own peculiar pretensions. From being proscribed themselves, they learn to proscribe others ; and come in the end to reduce all integrity of principle and soundness of opinion within the pale of their own little communion. Those who were out of it, and did not belong to the class of *Rational Dissenters*, I was led erroneously to look upon as hardly deserving the name of rational beings. Being thus satisfied as to the select few who are "the salt of the earth," it is easy to persuade ourselves that we are at the head of them, and to fancy ourselves of more importance in the scale of true desert than all the rest of the world put together, who do not interpret a certain text of Scripture in the manner that we have been taught to do. You will (from the difference of education) be free from this bigotry, and will, I hope, avoid everything akin to the same exclusive and narrow-minded spirit. Think that the minds of men are various as their faces ; that the modes and employments of life are numberless as they are necessary ; that there is more than one class of merit ; that though others may be wrong in some things, they are not so in all ; and that countless races of men have been born, have lived and died without ever hearing of any one of those points in which you take a just pride and pleasure, and

you will not err on the side of that spiritual pride or intellectual coxcombry which has been so often the bane of the studious and learned !

I observe you have got a way of speaking of your schoolfellows as "*that Hoare, that Harris,*" and so on, as if you meant to mark them out for particular reprobation, or did not think them good enough for you. It is a bad habit to speak disrespectfully of others ; for it will lead you to think and feel uncharitably towards them. Ill names beget ill blood. Even where there may be some repeated trifling provocation, it is better to be courteous, mild, and forbearing than captious, impatient, and fretful. The faults of others too often arise out of our own ill-temper ; or though they should be real, we shall not mend them by exasperating ourselves against them. Treat your playmates, as Hamlet advises Polonius to treat the players, "according to your own dignity, rather than their deserts." If you fly out at everything in them that you disapprove or think done on purpose to annoy you, you lie constantly at the mercy of their caprice, rudeness, or ill-nature. You should be more your own master.

Do not begin to quarrel with the world too soon ; for, bad as it may be, it is the best we have to live in—here. If railing would have made it better, it would have been reformed long ago ; but as this is not to be hoped for at present, the best way is to slide through it as contentedly and innocently as we may. The worst fault it has is want of charity ; and calling *knave* and *fool* at every turn will not cure this failing. Consider (as a matter of vanity) that if there were not so many knaves and fools as we find, the wise and honest would not be those rare and shining characters that they are allowed to be ; and (as a matter of philosophy) that if the world be really incorrigible in this respect, it is a reflection to make one sad, not angry. We may laugh or weep at the madness of mankind : we have no right to vilify them, for our own sakes or theirs. Misanthropy is not the disgust of the mind at human nature, but with itself ; or it is laying its own exaggerated vices and foul blots at the door of others ! Do not, however, mistake what I have here said. I would not have you, when you grow up, adopt the low and sordid fashion of palliating existing abuses or of putting the best face upon the worst things. I only mean that indiscriminate, unqualified satire can do little good, and that those who indulge in the most revolting speculations on human nature do not themselves always set the fairest examples or strive to prevent its lower degradation. They seem rather willing to reduce it to their theoretical standard. For the rest, the very outcry that is made (if sincere) shows that things cannot be quite so bad as they

are represented. The abstract hatred and scorn of vice implies the capacity for virtue: the impatience expressed at the most striking instances of deformity proves the innate idea and love of beauty in the human mind. The best antidote I can recommend to you hereafter against the disheartening effect of such writings as those of Rochefoucauld, Mandeville, and others, will be to look at the pictures of Raphael and Correggio. You need not be altogether ashamed, my dear little boy, of belonging to a species which could produce such faces as those; nor despair of doing something worthy of a laudable ambition, when you see what such hands have wrought! You will, perhaps, one day have reason to thank me for this advice.

As to your studies and school-exercises, I wish you to learn Latin, French, and dancing. I would insist upon the last more particularly, both because it is more likely to be neglected, and because it is of the greatest consequence to your success in life. Everything almost depends upon first impressions; and these depend (besides *person*, which is not in our power) upon two things, *dress* and *address*, which every one may command with proper attention. These are the small coin in the intercourse of life, which are continually in request; and perhaps you will find at the year's end, or towards the close of life, that the daily insults, coldness, or contempt to which you have been exposed by a neglect of such superficial recommendations are hardly atoned for by the few proofs of esteem or admiration which your integrity or talents have been able to extort in the course of it. When we habitually disregard those things which we know will ensure the favourable opinion of others, it shows we set that opinion at defiance, or consider ourselves above it, which no one ever did with impunity. An inattention to our own persons implies a disrespect to others, and may often be traced no less to a want of good-nature than of good sense. The old maxim, *Desire to please, and you will infallibly please*, explains the whole matter. If there is a tendency to vanity and affectation on this side of the question, there is an equal alloy of pride and obstinacy on the opposite one.—Slovenliness may at any time be cured by an effort of resolution, but a graceful carriage requires an early habit, and, in most cases, the aid of the dancing-master. I would not have you, from not knowing how to enter a room properly, stumble at the very threshold in the good graces of those on whom it is possible the fate of your future life may depend. Nothing creates a greater prejudice against any one than awkwardness. A person who is confused in manner and gesture seems to have done something wrong, or as if he was conscious of no one qualification to build a confidence in himself upon. On the other hand, openness, freedom, self-poses-

sion, set others at ease with you by showing that you are on good terms with yourself. Grace in women gains the affections sooner, and secures them longer, than anything else—it is an outward and visible sign of an inward harmony of soul—as the want of it in men, as if the mind and body equally hitched in difficulties and were distracted with doubts, is the greatest impediment in the career of gallantry and road to the female heart. Another thing I would caution you against is not to pore over your books till you are bent almost double—a habit you will never be able to get the better of, and which you will find of serious ill consequence. *A stoop in the shoulders* sinks a man in public and in private estimation. You are at present straight enough, and you walk with boldness and spirit. Do nothing to take away the use of your limbs or the spring and elasticity of your muscles. As to all worldly advantages, it is to the full of as much importance that your deportment should be erect and manly as your actions.

You will naturally find out all this and fall into it, if your attention is drawn out sufficiently to what is passing around you; and this will be the case, unless you are absorbed too much in books and those sedentary studies

“Which waste the marrow, and consume the brain.”

You are, I think, too fond of reading as it is. As one means of avoiding excess in this way, I would wish you to make it a rule never to read at meal-times, nor in company when there is any (even the most trivial) conversation going on, nor ever to let your eagerness to learn encroach upon your play-hours. Books are but one inlet of knowledge; and the pores of the mind, like those of the body, should be left open to all impressions. I applied too close to my studies, soon after I was of your age, and hurt myself irreparably by it. Whatever may be the value of learning, health and good spirits are of more.

I would have you, as I said, make yourself master of French, because you may find it of use in the commerce of life; and I would have you learn Latin, partly because I learnt it myself, and I would not have you without any of the advantages or sources of knowledge that I possessed—it would be a bar of separation between us—and secondly, because there is an atmosphere round this sort of classical ground to which that of actual life is gross and vulgar. Shut out from this garden of early sweetness, we may well exclaim—

“How shall we part and wander down  
Into a lower world, to this obscure  
And wild? How shall we breathe in other air  
Less pure, accustom'd to immortal fruits?”



I do not think the Classics so indispensable to the cultivation of your intellect as on another account, which I have explained elsewhere, and you will have no objection to turn with me to the passage.

“The study of the Classics is less to be regarded as an exercise of the intellect than as a *discipline of humanity*. The peculiar advantage of this mode of education consists not so much in strengthening the understanding as in softening and refining the taste. It gives men liberal views; it accustoms the mind to take an interest in things foreign to itself; to love virtue for its own sake; to prefer fame to life, and glory to riches; and to fix our thoughts on the remote and permanent instead of narrow and fleeting objects. It teaches us to believe that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion, and raises us above that low and servile fear which bows only to present power and upstart authority. Rome and Athens filled a place in the history of mankind which can never be occupied again. They were two cities set on a hill, which could not be hid; all eyes have seen them, and their light shines like a mighty sea-mark into the abyss of time.

‘Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,  
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands;  
Secure from flames, from envy’s fiercer rage,  
Destructive war, and all-involving age.  
Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,  
Immortal heirs of universal praise!  
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,  
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow!’

It is this feeling more than anything else which produces a marked difference between the study of the ancient and modern languages, and which, by the weight and importance of the consequences attached to the former, stamps every word with a monumental firmness. By conversing with the *mighty dead*, we imbibe sentiment with knowledge. We become strongly attached to those who can no longer either hurt or serve us, except through the influence which they exert over the mind. We feel the presence of that power which gives immortality to human thoughts and actions, and catch the flame of enthusiasm from all nations and ages.”

Because, however, you have learnt Latin and Greek, and can speak a different language, do not fancy yourself of a different order of beings from those you ordinarily converse with. They perhaps know and can do more *things* than you, though you have learnt a greater variety of *names* to express the same thing by. The great object, indeed, of these studies is to be “a cure for a narrow and selfish spirit,” and to carry the mind out of its petty and local prejudices

to the idea of a more general humanity. Do not fancy, because you are intimate with Homer and Virgil, that your neighbours who can never attain the same posthumous fame are to be despised, like those impudent valets who live in noble families and look down upon every one else. Though you are master of Cicero's "Orations," think it possible for a cobbler at a stall to be more eloquent than you. "But you are a scholar, and he is not." Well, then, you have that advantage over him, but it does not follow that you are to have every other. Look at the heads of the celebrated poets and philosophers of antiquity in the collection at Wilton, and you will say they answer to their works; but you will find others in the same collection whose names have hardly come down to us that are equally fine, and cast in the same classic mould. Do you imagine that all the thoughts, genius, and capacity of those old and mighty nations are contained in a few odd volumes, to be thumbed by schoolboys? This reflection is not meant to lessen your admiration of the great names to which you will be accustomed to look up, but to direct it to that solid mass of intellect and power, of which they were the most shining ornaments. I would wish you to excel in this sort of learning and to take a pleasure in it, because it is the path that has been chosen for you; but do not suppose that others do not excel equally in their line of study or exercise of skill, or that there is but one mode of excellence in art or nature. You have got on vastly beyond the point at which you set out; but others have been getting on as well as you in the same or other ways, and have kept pace with you. What then, you may ask, is the use of all the pains you have taken, if it gives you no superiority over mankind in general? It is this—You have reaped all the benefit of improvement and knowledge yourself; and further, if you had not moved forwards, you would by this time have been left behind. Envy no one, disparage no one, think yourself above no one. Their demerits will not piece out your deficiencies; nor is it a waste of time and labour for you to cultivate your own talents because you cannot bespeak a monopoly of all advantages. You are more learned than many of your acquaintance who may be more active, healthy, witty, successful in business, or expert in some elegant or useful art than you; but you have no reason to complain, if you have attained the object of your ambition. Or if you should not be able to compass this from a want of genius or parts, yet learn, my child, to be contented with a mediocrity of acquirements. You may still be respectable in your conduct, and enjoy a tranquil obscurity, with more friends and fewer enemies than you might otherwise have had.

There is one almost certain drawback on a course of scholastic study, that it unfits men for active life. The *ideal* is always at variance with the *practical*. The habit of fixing the attention on the imaginary and abstracted deprives the mind equally of energy and fortitude. By indulging our imaginations on fictions and chimeras, where we have it all our own way and are led on only by the pleasure of the prospect, we grow fastidious, effeminate, lapped in idle luxury, impatient of contradiction, and unable to sustain the shock of real adversity, when it comes; as by being taken up with abstract reasoning or remote events in which we are merely passive spectators, we have no resources to provide against it, no readiness, or expedients for the occasion, or spirit to use them, even if they occur. We must think again before we determine, and thus the opportunity for action is lost. While we are considering the very best possible mode of gaining an object, we find that it has slipped through our fingers, or that others have laid rude, fearless hands upon it. The youthful tyro reluctantly discovers that the ways of the world are not his ways, nor their thoughts his thoughts. Perhaps the old monastic institutions were not in this respect unwise, which carried on to the end of life the secluded habits and romantic associations with which it began, and which created a privileged world for the inhabitants, distinct from the common world of men and women. You will bring with you from your books and solitary reveries a wrong measure of men and things, unless you correct it by careful experience and mixed observation. You will raise your standard of character as much too high at first as from disappointed expectation it will sink too low afterwards. The best qualifier of this theoretical *mania* and of the dreams of poets and moralists (who both treat of things as *they ought to be* and not as *they are*) is in one sense to be found in some of our own popular writers, such as our Novelists and periodical Essayists. But you had, after all, better wait and see what things are than try to anticipate the results. You know more of a road by having travelled it than by all the conjectures and descriptions in the world. You will find the business of life conducted on a much more varied and individual scale than you would expect. People will be concerned about a thousand things that you have no idea of, and will be utterly indifferent to what you feel the greatest interest in. You will find good and evil, folly and discretion, more mingled, and the shades of character running more into each other than they do in the ethical charts. No one is equally wise or guarded at all points, and it is seldom that any one is quite a fool. Do not be surprised, when you go out into the

world, to find men talk exceedingly well on different subjects who do not derive their information immediately from books. In the first place, the light of books is diffused very much abroad in the world in conversation and at second hand; and besides, common-sense is not a monopoly, and experience and observation are sources of information open to the man of the world as well as to the retired student. If you know more of the outline and principles, he knows more of the details and "*practique* part of life." A man may discuss the adventures of a campaign in which he was engaged very agreeably without having read the "Retreat of the Ten Thousand," or give a singular account of the method of drying teas in China without being a profound chemist. It is the vice of scholars to suppose that there is no knowledge in the world but that of books. Do you avoid it, I conjure you; and thereby save yourself the pain and mortification that must ensue from finding out your mistake continually!

Gravity is one great ingredient in the conduct of life, and perhaps a certain share of it is hardly to be dispensed with. Few people can afford to be quite unaffected. At any rate, do not put your worst qualities foremost. Do not seek to distinguish yourself by being ridiculous, nor entertain that miserable ambition to be the sport and butt of the company. By aiming at a certain standard of behaviour or intellect, you will at least show your taste and value for what is excellent. There are those who *blurt* out their good things with so little heed of what they are about that no one thinks anything of them; as others by keeping their folly to themselves gain the reputation of wisdom. Do not, however, affect to speak only in oracles or to deal in *bon-mots*; condescend to the level of the company, and be free and accessible to all persons. Express whatever occurs to you, that cannot offend others or hurt yourself. Keep some opinions to yourself. Say what you please of others, but never repeat what you hear said of them to themselves. If you have nothing better to offer, laugh with the witty, assent to the wise; they will not think the worse of you for it. Listen to information on subjects you are unacquainted with, instead of always striving to lead the conversation to some favourite one of your own. By the last method you will shine, but will not improve. I am ashamed myself ever to open my lips on any question I have ever written upon. It is much more difficult to be able to converse on an equality with a number of persons in turn than to soar above their heads, and excite the stupid gaze of all companies by bestriding some senseless topic of your own and confounding the understandings of those who are ignorant of it. Be not too fond of argument. In-

deed, by going much into company (which I do not, however, wish you to do) you will be weaned from this practice, if you set out with it. Rather suggest what remarks may have occurred to you on a subject than aim at dictating your opinions to others or at defending yourself at all points. You will learn more by agreeing in the main with others and entering into their trains of thinking, than by contradicting and urging them to extremities. Avoid singularity of opinion as well as of everything else. Sound conclusions come with practical knowledge, rather than with speculative refinements; in what we really understand, we reason but little. Long-winded disputes fill up the place of common-sense and candid inquiry. Do not imagine that you will make people friends by showing your superiority over them; it is what they will neither admit nor forgive, unless you have a high and acknowledged reputation beforehand, which renders this sort of petty vanity more inexcusable. Seek to gain the goodwill of others, rather than to extort their applause; and to this end be neither too tenacious of your own claims nor inclined to press too hard on their weaknesses.

Do not affect the society of your inferiors in rank, nor court that of the great. There can be no real sympathy in either case. The first will consider you as a restraint upon them, and the last as an intruder or *upon sufferance*. It is not a desirable distinction to be admitted into company as a man of talents. You are a mark for invidious observation. If you say nothing or merely behave with common propriety and simplicity, you seem to have no business there. If you make a studied display of yourself, it is arrogating a consequence you have no right to. If you are contented to pass as an indifferent person, they despise you; if you distinguish yourself, and show more knowledge, wit, or taste than they do, they hate you for it. You have no alternative. I would rather be asked out to sing than to talk. Every one does not pretend to a fine voice, but every one fancies he has as much understanding as another. Indeed, the secret of this sort of intercourse has been pretty well found out. Literary men are seldom invited to the tables of the great; they send for players and musicians, as they keep monkeys and parrots!

I would not, however, have you run away with a notion that the rich are knaves or that lords are fools. They are, for what I know, as honest and as wise as other people. But it is a trick of our self-love, supposing that another has the decided advantage of us in one way, to strike a balance by taking it for granted (as a moral antithesis) that he must be as much beneath us in those qualities on which we plume ourselves, and which we would appropriate

almost entirely to our own use. It is hard indeed if others are raised above us not only by the gifts of fortune, but of understanding too. It is not to be credited. People have an unwillingness to admit that the House of Lords can be equal in talent to the House of Commons. So in the other sex, if a woman is handsome, she is an idiot or no better than she should be: in ours, if a man is worth a million of money, he is a miser, a fellow that cannot spell his own name, or a poor creature in some way, to bring him to our level. This is malice, and not truth. Believe all the good you can of every one. Do not measure others by yourself. If they have advantages which you have not, let your liberality keep pace with their good fortune. Envy no one, and you need envy no one. If you have but the magnanimity to allow merit wherever you see it—understanding in a lord or wit in a cobbler—this temper of mind will stand you instead of many accomplishments. Think no man too happy. Raphael died young: Milton had the misfortune to be blind. If any one is vain or proud, it is from folly or ignorance. Those who pique themselves excessively on some one thing have but that one thing to pique themselves upon, as languages, mechanics, &c. I do not say that this is not an enviable delusion where it is not liable to be disturbed; but at present knowledge is too much diffused and pretensions come too much into collision for this to be long the case; and it is better not to form such a prejudice at first than to have it to undo all the rest of one's life. If you learn any two things, though they may put you out of conceit one with the other, they will effectually cure you of any conceit you might have of yourself, by showing the variety and scope there is in the human mind beyond the limits you had set to it.

You were convinced the first day that you could not learn Latin, which now you find easy. Be taught from this, not to think other obstacles insurmountable that you may meet with in the course of your life, though they seem so at first sight.

Attend above all things to your health; or rather, do nothing wilfully to impair it. Use exercise, abstinence, and regular hours. Drink water when you are alone, and wine or very little spirits in company. It is the last that are ruinous by leading to unlimited excess. There is not the same headlong *impetus* in wine. But one glass of brandy and water makes you want another, that other makes you want a third, and so on, in an increased proportion. Therefore no one can stop midway who does not possess the resolution to abstain altogether; for the inclination is sharpened with its indulgence. Never gamble. Or if you play for anything, never do so for what will give you uneasiness the next day. Be not precise in these

matters; but do not pass certain limits, which it is difficult to recover. Do nothing in the irritation of the moment, but take time to reflect. Because you have done one foolish thing, do not do another; nor throw away your health or reputation or comfort to thwart impertinent advice. Avoid a spirit of contradiction, both in words and actions. Do not aim at what is beyond your reach, but at what is within it. Indulge in calm and pleasing pursuits, rather than violent excitements; and learn to conquer your own will, instead of striving to obtain the mastery of that of others.

With respect to your friends, I would wish you to choose them neither from caprice nor accident, and to adhere to them as long as you can. Do not take a surfeit of friendship, through over-sanguine enthusiasm, nor expect it to last for ever. Always speak well of those with whom you have once been intimate, or take some part of the censure you bestow on them to yourself. Never quarrel with tried friends, or those whom you wish to continue such. Wounds of this kind are sure to open again. When once the prejudice is removed that sheaths defects, familiarity only causes jealousy and distrust. Do not keep on with a mockery of friendship after the substance is gone—but part, while you can part friends. Bury the carcass of friendship: it is not worth embalming.

As to the books you will have to read by choice or for amusement, the best are the commonest. The names of many of them are already familiar to you. Read them as you grow up with all the satisfaction in your power, and make much of them. It is perhaps the greatest pleasure you will have in life, the one you will think of longest, and repent of least. If my life had been more full of calamity than it has been (much more than I hope yours will be), I would live it over again, my poor little boy, to have read the books I did in my youth.

In politics I wish you to be an honest man, but no brawler. Hate injustice and falsehood for your own sake. Be neither a martyr nor a sycophant. Wish well to the world without expecting to see it much better than it is; and do not gratify the enemies of liberty by putting yourself at their mercy, if it can be avoided with honour. . . .

There is but one other point on which I meant to speak to you, and that is, the choice of a profession. This, probably, had better be left to time or accident or your own inclination. You have a very fine ear, but I have somehow a prejudice against men-singers, and indeed against the stage altogether. It is an uncertain and ungrateful soil. All professions are bad that depend on reputation, which is “as often got without merit as lost without deserving.” Yet I

cannot easily reconcile myself to your being a slave to business, and I shall hardly be able to leave you an independence. A situation in a public office is secure, but laborious and mechanical, and without the two great springs of life, Hope and Fear. Perhaps, however, it might ensure you a competence, and leave you leisure for some other favourite amusement or pursuit. I have said all reputation is hazardous, hard to win, harder to keep. Many never attain a glimpse of what they have all their lives been looking for, and others survive a passing shadow of it. Yet if I were to name one pursuit rather than another, I should wish you to be a good painter, if such a thing could be hoped. I have failed in this myself, and should wish you to be able to do what I have not—to paint like Claude or Rembrandt or Guido or Vandyke, if it were possible. Artists, I think, who have succeeded in their chief object, live to be old, and are agreeable old men. Their minds keep alive to the last. Cosway's spirits never flagged till after ninety, and Nollekens, though blind, passed all his mornings in giving directions about some group or bust in his workshop. You have seen Mr. Northcote, that delightful specimen of the last age. With what avidity he takes up his pencil, or lays it down again to talk of numberless things! His eye has not lost its lustre, nor "paled its ineffectual fire." His body is a shadow: he himself is a pure spirit. There is a kind of immortality about this sort of ideal and visionary existence that dallies with Fate and baffles the grim monster, Death. If I thought you could make as clever an artist and arrive at such an agreeable old age as Mr. Northcote, I should declare at once for your devoting yourself to this enchanting profession; and in that reliance should feel less regret at some of my own disappointments, and little anxiety on your account!

[*The Plain Speaker. Opinions on Books, Men, and Things.* 2 vols, 1826. Second Edition, 1851. Third Edition, 1873.]

### BURKE'S STYLE.

[From the Essay "On the Prose-Style of Poets."]

It has always appeared to me that the most perfect prose-style, the most powerful, the most dazzling, the most daring, that which went the nearest to the verge of poetry, and yet never fell over, was Burke's. It has the solidity and sparkling effect of the



diamond: all other *fine writing* is like French paste or Bristol-stones in the comparison. Burke's style is airy, flighty, adventurous, but it never loses sight of the subject; nay, is always in contact with and derives its increased or varying impulse from it. It may be said to pass yawning gulfs "on the unsteadfast footing of a spear:" still it has an actual resting-place and tangible support under it—it is not suspended on nothing. It differs from poetry, as I conceive, like the chamois from the eagle: it climbs to an almost equal height, touches upon a cloud, overlooks a precipice, is picturesque, sublime—but all the while, instead of soaring through the air, it stands upon a rocky cliff, clammers up by abrupt and intricate ways, and browses on the roughest bark or crops the tender flower. The principle which guides his pen is truth, not beauty—not pleasure, but power. He has no choice, no selection of subject to flatter the reader's idle taste or assist his own fancy: he must take what comes, and make the most of it. He works the most striking effects out of the most unpromising materials, by the mere activity of his mind. He rises with the lofty, descends with the mean, luxuriates in beauty, gloats over deformity. It is all the same to him, so that he loses no particle of the exact, characteristic, extreme impression of the thing he writes about, and that he communicates this to the reader, after exhausting every possible mode of illustration, plain or abstracted, figurative or literal. Whatever stamps the original image more distinctly on the mind is welcome. The nature of his task precludes continual beauty; but it does not preclude continual ingenuity, force, originality. He had to treat of political questions, mixed modes, abstract ideas, and his fancy (or poetry, if you will) was ingrafted on these artificially, and, as it might sometimes be thought, violently, instead of growing naturally out of them, as it would spring of its own accord from individual objects and feelings. . . . What can be more remote, for instance, and at the same time more apposite, more *the same*, than the following comparison of the English Constitution to "the proud Keep of Windsor," in the celebrated Letter to a noble Lord?

"Such are *their* ideas; such *their* religion, and such *their* law. But as to *our* country and *our* race, as long as the well-compacted structure of our Church and State, the sanctuary, the holy of holies of that ancient law, defended by reverence, defended by power—a fortress at once and a temple—shall stand inviolate on the brow of the British Sion; as long as the British Monarchy—not more limited than fenced by the orders of the State—shall, like the proud Keep of Windsor, rising in the majesty of proportion, and girt with the double belt of its kindred and coeval towers; as long as this

awful structure shall oversee and guard the subjected land, so long the mounds and dykes of the low, fat, Bedford level will have nothing to fear from all the pickaxes of all the levellers of France. As long as our Sovereign Lord the King, and his faithful subjects, the Lords and Commons of this realm—the triple cord which no man can break; the solemn, sworn, constitutional frank-pledge of this nation; the firm guarantees of each other's being and each other's rights; the joint and several securities, each in its place and order, for every kind and every quality of property and of dignity—as long as these endure, so long the Duke of Bedford is safe: and we are all safe together—the high, from the blights of envy and the spoliations of rapacity; the low, from the iron hand of oppression and the insolent spurn of contempt. Amen! and so be it: and so it will be,

' Dum domus Æneæ Capitoli immobile saxum  
Accolet; imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.' "

Nothing can well be more impracticable to a simile than the vague and complicated idea which is here embodied in one; yet how finely, how nobly it stands out, in natural grandeur, in royal state, with double barriers round it to answer for its identity, with "buttress, frieze, and coigne of 'vantage" for the imagination to "make its pendant bed and procreant cradle," till the idea is confounded with the object representing it—the wonder of a kingdom; and then how striking, how determined the descent, "at one fell swoop," to the "low, fat, Bedford level!" Poetry would have been bound to maintain a certain decorum, a regular balance between these two ideas; sterling prose throws aside all such idle respect to appearances, and with its pen, like a sword, "sharp and sweet," lays open the naked truth! The poet's Muse is like a mistress, whom we keep only while she is young and beautiful, *durante bene placito*; the Muse of prose is like a wife, whom we take during life, *for better, for worse*. Burke's execution, like that of all good prose, savours of the texture of what he describes, and his pen slides or drags over the ground of his subject, like the painter's pencil. The most rigid fidelity and the most fanciful extravagance meet and are reconciled in his pages. I never pass Windsor but I think of this passage in Burke, and hardly know to which I am indebted most for enriching my moral sense, that or the fine picturesque stanza in Gray:

" From Windsor's heights the expanse below  
Of mead, of lawn, of wood survey," &c.

## COLERIDGE'S STYLE.

I AM indebted to Mr. Coleridge for the comparison of poetic prose to the second-hand finery of a lady's-maid (just made use of). He himself is an instance of his own observation, and (what is even worse) of the opposite fault—an affectation of quaintness and originality. With bits of tarnished lace and worthless frippery, he assumes a sweeping oriental costume, or borrows the stiff dresses of our ancestors, or starts an eccentric fashion of his own. He is swelling and turgid—everlastingly aiming to be greater than his subject; filling his fancy with fumes and vapours in the pangs and throes of miraculous parturition, and bringing forth only *still births*. He has an incessant craving, as it were, to exalt every idea into a metaphor, to expand every sentiment into a lengthened mystery, voluminous and vast, confused and cloudy. His style is not succinct, but encumbered with a train of words and images that have no practical, and only a possible, relation to one another—that add to its stateliness, but impede its march. One of his sentences winds its “forlorn way obscure” over the page like a patriarchal procession with camels laden, wreathed turbans, household wealth, the whole riches of the author's mind poured out upon the barren waste of his subject. The palm-tree spreads its sterile branches overhead, and the land of promise is seen in the distance. All this is owing to his wishing to overdo everything—to make something more out of everything than it is, or than it is worth. The simple truth does not satisfy him—no direct proposition fills up the moulds of his understanding. All is foreign, far-fetched, irrelevant, laboured, unproductive. To read one of his disquisitions is like hearing the variations to a piece of music without the score. Or, to vary the simile, he is not like a man going a journey by the stage-coach along the highroad, but is always getting into a balloon and mounting into the air, above the plain ground of prose. Whether he soars to the empyrean or dives to the centre (as he sometimes does), it is equally to get away from the question before him, and to prove that he owes everything to his own mind. His object is to invent; he scorns to imitate. The business of prose is the contrary. But Mr. Coleridge is a poet, and his thoughts are free.

## LEIGH HUNT'S STYLE.

To my taste, the author of “*Rimini*” and Editor of the *Examiner* is among the best and least corrupted of our poetical prose-writers. In his light but well-supported columns we find the raciness, the

sharpness, and sparkling effect of poetry, with little that is extravagant or far-fetched, and no turgidity or pompous pretension. Perhaps there is too much the appearance of relaxation and trifling (as if he had escaped the shackles of rhyme), a caprice, a levity, and a disposition to innovate in words and ideas. Still, the genuine master-spirit of the prose-writer is there; the tone of lively, sensible conversation; and this may in part arise from the author's being himself an animated talker. Mr. Hunt wants something of the heat and earnestness of the political partisan; but his familiar and miscellaneous papers have all the ease, grace, and point of the best style of Essay-writing. Many of his effusions in the *Indicator* show that if he had devoted himself exclusively to that mode of writing, he inherits more of the spirit of Steele than any man since his time.

Not to spin out this discussion too much, I would conclude by observing, that some of the old English prose-writers (who were not poets) are the best, and, at the same time, the most *poetical* in the favourable sense. Among these we may reckon some of the old divines, and Jeremy Taylor at the head of them. There is a flush like the dawn over his writings; the sweetness of the rose, the freshness of the morning dew. There is a softness in his style, proceeding from the tenderness of his heart: but his head is firm, and his hand is free. His materials are as finely wrought up as they are original and attractive in themselves. Milton's prose-style savours too much of poetry, and, as I have already hinted, of an imitation of the Latin. Dryden's is perfectly unexceptionable, and a model, in simplicity, strength, and perspicuity, for the subjects he treated of.

## THE CONVERSATION OF AUTHORS.

. . . Books are a world in themselves, it is true; but they are not the only world. The world itself is a volume larger than all the libraries in it. Learning is a sacred deposit from the experience of ages; but it has not put all future experience on the shelf, or debarred the common herd of mankind from the use of their hands, tongues, eyes, ears, or understandings. Taste is a luxury for the privileged few; but it would be hard upon those who have not the same standard of refinement in their own minds that we suppose ourselves to have, if this should prevent them from having recourse, as usual, to their old frolics, coarse jokes, and horse-play, and getting through the wear and tear of the world, with such homely sayings and

shrewd helps as they may. Happy is it, that the mass of mankind eat and drink, and sleep, and perform their several tasks, and do as they like without us—caring nothing for our scribblings, our carpings, and our quibbles; and moving on the same, in spite of our fine-spun distinctions, fantastic theories, and lines of demarcation, which are like chalk-figures drawn on ballroom floors to be danced out before morning! In the field opposite the window where I write this there is a country-girl picking stones: in the one next it there are several poor women weeding the blue and red flowers from the corn: farther on, are two boys tending a flock of sheep. What do they know or care about what I am writing about them, or ever will?—or what would they be the better for it, if they did? Or why need we despise

“ The wretched slave,  
Who like a lackey, from the rise to the set,  
Sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and all night  
Sleeps in Elysium; next day, after dawn,  
Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse;  
And follows so the ever-running year  
With profitable labour to his grave!”

Is not this life as sweet as writing *Ephemerides*? But we put that which flutters the brain idly for a moment, and then is heard no more, in competition with nature, which exists everywhere, and lasts always. We not only underrate the force of nature, and make too much of art, but we also overrate our own accomplishments and advantages derived from art. In the presence of clownish ignorance, or of persons without any great pretensions, real or affected, we are very much inclined to look upon ourselves as the virtual representatives of science, art, and literature. We have a strong itch to show off and do the honours of civilisation for all the great men whose works we have ever read, and whose names our auditors have never heard of, as noblemen's lackeys, in the absence of their masters, give themselves airs of superiority over every one else. But though we have read Congreve, a stage-coachman may be an overmatch for us in wit: though we are deep-versed in the excellence of Shakspeare's colloquial style, a village beldam may outscold us: though we have read Machiavel in the original Italian, we may be easily outwitted by a clown: and though we have cried our eyes out over the “*New Eloise*,” a poor shepherd lad, who hardly knows how to spell his own name, may “tell his tale, under the thawthorn in the dale,” and prove a more thriving wooer. What, then is the advantage we possess over the meanest of the mean? Why, this, that we have read Congreve, Shakspeare, Machiavel, the “*New*

Eloise ;"—not that we are to have their wit, genius, shrewdness, or melting tenderness. . . .

Argument, again, is the death of conversation, if carried on in a spirit of hostility : but discussion is a pleasant and profitable thing, where you advance and defend your opinions as far as you can, and admit the truth of what is objected against them with equal impartiality : in short, where you do not pretend to set up for an oracle, but freely declare what you really know about any question, or suggest what has struck you as throwing a new light upon it, and let it pass for what it is worth. This tone of conversation was well described by Dr. Johnson, when he said of some party at which he had been present the night before, "We had a good talk, sir !" As a general rule, there is no conversation worth anything but between friends, or those who agree in the same leading views of a subject. Nothing was ever learnt by either side in a dispute. You contradict one another, will not allow a grain of sense in what your adversary advances, are blind to whatever makes against yourself, dare not look the question fairly in the face, so that you cannot avail yourself even of your real advantages, insist most on what you feel to be the weakest points of your argument, and get more and more absurd, dogmatical, and violent every moment. . . .

This litigious humour is bad enough : but there is one character still worse—that of a person who goes into company, not to contradict, but to *talk at* you. This is the greatest nuisance in civilised society. Such a person does not come armed to defend himself at all points, but to unsettle, if he can, and throw a slur on all your favourite opinions. If he has a notion that any one in the room is fond of poetry, he immediately volunteers a contemptuous tirade against the idle jingle of verse. If he suspects you have a delight in pictures, he endeavours, not by fair argument, but by a side-wind, to put you out of conceit with so frivolous an art. If you have a taste for music, he does not think much good is to be done by this tickling of the ears. If you speak in praise of a comedy, he does not see the use of wit : if you say you have been to a tragedy, he shakes his head at this mockery of human misery, and thinks it ought to be prohibited. He tries to find out beforehand whatever it is that you take a particular pride or pleasure in, that he may annoy your self-love in the tenderest point (as if he were probing a wound) and make you dissatisfied with yourself and your pursuits for several days afterwards. A person might as well make a practice of throwing out scandalous aspersions against your dearest friends or nearest relations, by way of ingratiating himself into your favour. Such ill-timed imperti-

nence is "villainous, and shows a pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it."

The soul of conversation is sympathy.—Authors should converse chiefly with authors, and their talk should be of books. "When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war." There is nothing so pedantic as pretending not to be pedantic. No man can get above his pursuit in life: it is getting above himself, which is impossible. There is a freemasonry in all things. You can only speak to be understood, but this you cannot be, except by those who are in the secret. Hence an argument has been drawn to supersede the necessity of conversation altogether; for it has been said, that there is no use in talking to people of sense, who know all that you can tell them, nor to fools, who will not be instructed. There is, however, the smallest encouragement to proceed, when you are conscious that the more you really enter into a subject, the farther you will be from the comprehension of your hearers; and that the more proofs you give of any position, the more odd and out-of-the-way they will think your notions. Coleridge is the only person who can talk to all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, without caring a farthing for their understanding one word he says—and *he* talks only for admiration and to be listened to, and accordingly the least interruption puts him out. I firmly believe he would make just the same impression on half his audiences, if he purposely repeated absolute nonsense with the same voice and manner and inexhaustible flow of undulating speech! In general, wit shines only by reflection. You must take your cue from your company—must rise as they rise, and sink as they fall. You must see that your good things, your knowing allusions, are not flung away, like the pearls in the adage. What a check it is to be asked a foolish question; to find that the first principles are not understood! You are thrown on your back immediately, the conversation is stopped like a country-dance by those who do not know the figure. But when a set of adepts, of *illuminati*, get about a question, it is worth while to hear them talk. They may snarl and quarrel over it, like dogs; but they pick it bare to the bone, they masticate it thoroughly.

#### CHARLES LAMB'S EVENINGS.

THIS was the case formerly at Lamb's, where we used to have many lively skirmishes at their Thursday evening parties. I doubt whether the Small-coal man's musical parties could exceed them. Oh! for

the pen of John Bunce to consecrate a *petit souvenir* to their memory!—There was Lamb himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun, and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half-sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen, laughing, hare-brained vein of home-felt truth! What choice venom! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we got into the heart of controversy! How we picked out the marrow of authors! “And, in our flowing cups, many a good name and true was freshly remembered.” Recollect (most sage and critical reader) that in all this I was but a guest! Need I go over the names? They were but the old everlasting set—Milton and Shakspeare, Pope and Dryden, Steele and Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth’s prints, Claude’s landscapes, the Cartoons at Hampton Court, and all those things that, having once been, must ever be. The Scotch Novels had not then been heard of: so we said nothing about them. In general, we were hard upon the moderns. The author of the “Rambler” was only tolerated in Boswell’s “Life” of him; and it was as much as any one could do to edge in a word for “Junius.” Lamb could not bear “Gil Blas.” This was a fault. I remember the greatest triumph I ever had was in persuading him, after some years’ difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollett. On one occasion he was for making out a list of persons famous in history that one would wish to see again—at the head of whom were Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus—but we blackballed most of his list! But with what a gusto would he describe his favourite authors, Donne or Sir Philip Sidney, and call their most crabbed passages *delicious*! He tried them on his palate as epicures taste olives, and his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue. With what discrimination he hinted a defect in what he admired most!—as in saying that the display of the sumptuous banquet in “Paradise Regained” was not in true keeping, as the simplest fare was all that was necessary to tempt the extremity of hunger—and stating that Adam and Eve in “Paradise Lost” were too much like married people. He has furnished many a text for Coleridge to preach upon. There was no fuss or cant about him: nor were his sweets or his sour sours ever diluted with one particle of affectation. I cannot say that the party at Lamb’s were all of one de-



scription. There were honorary members, lay-brothers. Wit and good-fellowship was the motto inscribed over the door. When a stranger came in, it was not asked, "Has he written anything?"—we were above that pedantry; but we waited to see what he could do. If he could take a hand at piquet, he was welcome to sit down. If a person liked anything, if he took snuff heartily, it was sufficient. He would understand, by analogy, the pungency of other things besides Irish blackguard or Scotch rappee. A character was good anywhere, in a room or on paper. But we abhorred insipidity, affectation, and fine gentlemen. There was one of our party who never failed to mark "two for his Nob" at cribbage, and he was thought no mean person. This was Ned Phillips, and a better fellow in his way breathes not. There was —, who asserted some incredible matter of fact as a likely paradox, and settled all controversies by an *ipse dixit*, a *fiat* of his will, hammering out many a hard theory on the anvil of his brain—the Baron Munchausen of politics and practical philosophy:—there was Captain Burney, who had you at an advantage by never understanding you:—there was Jem White, the author of "Falstaff's Letters," who the other day left this dull world to go in search of more kindred spirits, "turning like the latter end of a lover's lute:"—there was Ayrton, who sometimes dropped in, the Will Honeycomb of our set—and Mrs. Reynolds, who, being of a quiet turn, loved to hear a noisy debate. An utterly uninformed person might have supposed this a scene of vulgar confusion and uproar. While the most critical question was pending, while the most difficult problem in philosophy was solving, Phillips cried out, "That's game," and Martin Burney muttered a quotation over the last remains of a veal-pie at a side-table. Once, and once only, the literary interest overcame the general. For Coleridge was riding the high German horse, and demonstrating the Categories of the Transcendental Philosophy to the author of the "Road to Ruin;" who insisted on his knowledge of German, and German metaphysics, having read the "Critique of Pure Reason" in the original. "My dear Mr. Holcroft," said Coleridge, in a tone of infinitely provoking conciliation, "you really put me in mind of a sweet, pretty German girl, about fifteen, that I met with in the Hartz forest in Germany—and who one day, as I was reading the "Limits of the Knowable and the Unknowable," the profoundest of all his works, with great attention, came behind my chair, and leaning over, said, 'What! *you* read Kant? Why, *I*, that am a German born, don't understand him!'" This was too much to bear, and Holcroft, starting up, called out in no measured tone, "Mr. Coleridge, you are the most eloquent man I ever met with, and the most

troublesome with your eloquence!" Phillips held the cribbage-peg, that was to mark him game, suspended in his hand; and the whist-table was silent for a moment. I saw Holcroft downstairs, and on coming to the landing-place at Mitre Court, he stopped me to observe, that "he thought Mr. Coleridge a very clever man, with a great command of language, but that he feared he did not always affix very precise ideas to the words he used." After he was gone we had our laugh out, and went on with the argument on the nature of Reason, the Imagination, and the Will. I wish I could find a publisher for it; it would make a supplement to the "*Biographia Literaria*," in a volume and a half octavo.

Those days are over! An event, the name of which I wish never to mention, broke up our party, like a bombshell thrown into the room; and now we seldom meet:

"Like angels' visits, short and far between."

There is no longer the same set of persons, nor of associations. Lamb does not live where he did. By shifting his abode, his notions seem less fixed. He does not wear his old snuff-coloured coat and breeches. It looks like an alteration in his style. An author and a wit should have a separate costume, a particular cloth; he should present something positive and singular to the mind, like Mr. Douce of the Museum. Our faith in the religion of letters will not bear to be taken to pieces, and put together again by caprice or accident. Leigh Hunt goes there sometimes. He has a fine vinous spirit about him, and tropical blood in his veins; but he is better at his own table. He has a great flow of pleasantry and delightful animal spirits; but his hits do not tell like Lamb's; you cannot repeat them the next day. He requires not only to be appreciated, but to have a select circle of admirers and devotees, to feel himself quite at home. He sits at the head of a party with great gaiety and grace; has an elegant manner and turn of features; is never at a loss—*aliquando sufflammandus erat*—has continual sportive sallies of wit or fancy; tells a story capitally; mimics an actor or an acquaintance to admiration; laughs with great glee and good-humour at his own or other people's jokes; understands the point of an equivoque or an observation immediately; has a taste and knowledge of books, of music, of medals; manages an argument adroitly; is genteel and gallant, and has a set of by-phrases and quaint allusions always at hand to produce a laugh:—if he has a fault, it is that he does not listen so well as he speaks, is impatient of interruption, and is fond of being looked up to, without considering by whom. I believe, how-

ever, he has pretty well seen the folly of this. Neither is his ready display of personal accomplishment and variety of resources an advantage to his writings. They sometimes present a desultory and slipshod appearance, owing to this very circumstance. The same things that tell, perhaps, best to a private circle round the fireside are not always intelligible to the public, nor does he take pains to make them so. He is too confident and secure of his audience. That which may be entertaining enough with the assistance of a certain liveliness of manner may read very flat on paper, because it is abstracted from all the circumstances that had set it off to advantage. A writer should recollect that he has only to trust to the immediate impression of words, like a musician who sings without the accompaniment of an instrument. There is nothing to help out, or slubber over, the defects of the voice in the one case, nor of the style in the other. The reader may, if he pleases, get a very good idea of Leigh Hunt's conversation from a very agreeable paper he has lately published, called the *Indicator*, than which nothing can be more happily conceived or executed.

The art of conversation is the art of hearing as well as of being heard. Authors in general are not good listeners. Some of the best talkers are, on this account, the worst company; and some who are very indifferent, but very great talkers, are as bad. It is sometimes wonderful to see how a person who has been entertaining or tiring a company by the hour together drops his countenance as if he had been shot, or had been seized with a sudden lockjaw, the moment any one interposes a single observation. The best converser I know is, however, the best listener. I mean Mr. Northcote, the painter. Painters by their profession are not bound to shine in conversation, and they shine the more. He lends his ear to an observation as if you had brought him a piece of news, and enters into it with as much avidity and earnestness as if it interested himself personally. If he repeats an old remark or story, it is with the same freshness and point as for the first time. It always arises out of the occasion, and has the stamp of originality. There is no parroting of himself. His look is a continual, ever-varying history-piece of what passes in his mind. His face is a book. There need no marks of interjection or interrogation to what he says. His manner is quite picturesque. There is an excess of character and *naïveté* that never tires. His thoughts bubble up and sparkle like beads on old wine. The fund of anecdote, the collection of curious particulars, is enough to set up any common retailer of jests that dines out every day; but these are not strung together like a row of galley-slaves, but are always introduced to illustrate some argument or bring out some fine

distinction of character. The mixture of spleen adds to the sharpness of the point, like poisoned arrows. Mr. Northcote enlarges with enthusiasm on the old painters, and tells good things of the new. The only thing he ever vexed me in was his liking the "Catalogue Raisonné." I had almost as soon hear him talk of Titian's pictures (which he does with tears in his eyes, and looking just like them) as see the originals, and I had rather hear him talk of Sir Joshua's than see them. He is the last of that school who knew Goldsmith and Johnson. How finely he describes Pope! His elegance of mind, his figure, his character, were not unlike his own. He does not resemble a modern Englishman, but puts one in mind of a Roman cardinal or a Spanish inquisitor. I never ate or drank with Mr. Northcote; but I have lived on his conversation with undiminished relish ever since I can remember,—and when I leave it, I come out into the street with feelings lighter and more ethereal than I have at any other time. . . .

There is a character of a gentleman; so there is a character of a scholar, which is no less easily recognised. The one has an air of books about him, as the other has of good-breeding. The one wears his thoughts as the other does his clothes, gracefully; and even if they are a little old-fashioned, they are not ridiculous: they have had their day. The gentleman shows, by his manner, that he has been used to respect from others: the scholar, that he lays claim to self-respect and to a certain independence of opinion. The one has been accustomed to the best company; the other has passed his time in cultivating an intimacy with the best authors. There is nothing forward or vulgar in the behaviour of the one; nothing shrewd or petulant in the observations of the other, as if he should astonish the bystanders, or was astonished himself at his own discoveries. Good taste and good sense, like common politeness, are, or are supposed to be, matters of course. One is distinguished by an appearance of marked attention to every one present; the other manifests an habitual air of abstraction and absence of mind. The one is not an upstart, with all the self-important airs of the founder of his own fortune; nor the other a self-taught man, with the repulsive self-sufficiency which arises from an ignorance of what hundreds have known before him. We must excuse, perhaps, a little conscious family pride in the one, and a little harmless pedantry in the other. As there is a class of the first character which sinks into the mere gentleman—that is, which has nothing but this sense of respectability and propriety to support it—so the character of a scholar not infrequently dwindles down into the shadow of a shade, till nothing is left of it but the mere bookworm. There is often something

amiable as well as enviable in this last character. I know one such instance, at least. The person I mean has an admiration for learning, if he is only dazzled by its light. He lives among old authors, if he does not enter much into their spirit. He handles the covers, and turns over the page, and is familiar with the names and dates. He is busy and self-involved. He hangs like a film and cobweb upon letters, or is like the dust upon the outside of knowledge, which should not be rudely brushed aside. He follows learning as its shadow; but as such, he is respectable. He browses on the husk and leaves of books, as the young fawn browses on the bark and leaves of trees. Such a one lives all his life in a dream of learning, and has never once had his sleep broken by a real sense of things. He believes implicitly in genius, truth, virtue, liberty, because he finds the names of these things in books. He thinks that love and friendship are the finest things imaginable, both in practice and theory. The legend of good women is to him no fiction. When he steals from the twilight of his cell, the scene breaks upon him like an illuminated missal, and all the people he sees are but so many figures in a *camera obscura*. He reads the world, like a favourite volume, only to find beauties in it, or like an edition of some old work which he is preparing for the press, only to make emendations in it, and correct the errors that have inadvertently slipped in. He and his dog Tray are much the same honest, simple-hearted, faithful, affectionate creatures—if Tray could but read! His mind cannot take the impression of vice; but the gentleness of his nature turns gall to milk. He would not hurt a fly. He draws the picture of mankind from the guileless simplicity of his own heart: and when he dies, his spirit will take its smiling leave, without having ever had an ill thought of others, or the consciousness of one in itself!

#### APPLICATION TO STUDY.

. . . I THINK there are two mistakes, common enough, on this subject; viz., that men of genius, or of first-rate capacity, do little, except by intermittent fits, or *per saltum*, and that they do that little in a slight and slovenly manner. There may be instances of this; but they are not the highest, and they are the exceptions, not the rule. On the contrary, the greatest artists have in general been the most prolific or the most elaborate, as the best writers have been frequently the most voluminous as well as indefatigable. We have a great living instance among writers, that the quality of a man's productions is not to be estimated in the inverse ratio of

their quantity—I mean in the author of “Waverley,” the fecundity of whose pen is no less admirable than its fecundity. Shakspeare is another instance of the same prodigality of genius; his materials being endlessly poured forth with no niggard or fastidious hand, and the mastery of the execution being (in many respects at least) equal to the boldness of the design. As one example among others that I might cite of the attention which he gave to his subject, it is sufficient to observe, that there is scarcely a word in any of his more striking passages that can be altered for the better. If any person, for instance, is trying to recollect a favourite line, and cannot hit upon some particular expression, it is in vain to think of substituting any other so good. That in the original text is not merely the best, but it seems the only right one. I will stop to illustrate this point a little. I was at a loss the other day for the line in Henry V.:

“*Nice* customs curtesy to great kings.”

I could not recollect the word *nice*: I tried a number of others, such as *old*, *grave*, &c.—they would none of them do, but seemed all heavy, lumbering, or from the purpose: the word *nice*, on the contrary, appeared to drop into its place, and be ready to assist in paying the reverence required. Again:

“A jest’s *prosperity* lies in the ear  
Of him that hears it.”

I thought, in quoting from memory, of “A jest’s *success*,” “A jest’s *renown*,” &c. I then turned to the volume, and there found the very word that of all others expressed the idea. Had Shakspeare searched through the four quarters of the globe, he could not have lighted on another to convey so exactly what he meant—a *casual*, *hollow*, *sounding* success! I could multiply such examples, but that I am sure the reader will easily supply them himself; and they show sufficiently that Shakspeare was not (as he is often represented) a loose or clumsy writer. The bold, happy texture of his style, in which every word is prominent, and yet cannot be torn from its place without violence, any more than a limb from the body, is (one should think) the result either of vigilant painstaking or of unerring, intuitive perception, and not the mark of crude conceptions and “the random, blindfold blows of Ignorance.”

There cannot be a greater contradiction to the common prejudice that “Genius is naturally a truant and a vagabond” than the astonishing and (on this hypothesis) unaccountable number of *chefs-*

*d'œuvre* left behind them by the old masters. The stream of their invention supplies the taste of successive generations like a river: they furnish a hundred galleries, and preclude competition, not more by the excellence than by the number of their performances. Take Raphael and Rubens alone. There are works of theirs in single collections enough to occupy a long and laborious life, and yet their works are spread through all the collections of Europe. They seem to have cost them no more labour than if they "had drawn in their breath and puffed it forth again." But we know that they made drawings, studies, sketches, of all the principal of these, with the care and caution of the merest tyros in the art; and they remain equal proofs of their capacity and diligence. The cartoons of Raphael alone might have employed many years, and made a life of illustrious labour, though they look as if they had been struck off at a blow, and are not a tenth part of what he produced in his short but bright career. Titian and Michael Angelo lived longer, but they worked as hard and did as well. Shall we bring in competition with examples like these some trashy caricaturist or idle dauber, who has no sense of the infinite resources of nature or art, nor, consequently, any power to employ himself upon them for any length of time or to any purpose, to prove that genius and regular industry are incompatible qualities?

In my opinion, the very superiority of the works of the great painters (instead of being a bar to) accounts for their multiplicity. Power is pleasure; and pleasure sweetens pain. A fine poet thus describes the effect of the sight of nature on his mind:

— "The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms were then to me  
 An appetite, a feeling, and a love,  
 That had no need of a remoter charm  
 By thought supplied, or any interest  
 Unborrowed from the eye."

So the forms of nature, or the human form divine, stood before the great artists of old, nor required any other stimulus to lead the eye to survey or the hand to embody them, than the pleasure derived from the inspiration of the subject, and "propulsive force" of the mimic creation. The grandeur of their works was an argument with them, not to stop short, but to proceed. They could have no higher excitement or satisfaction than in the exercise of their art and endless generation of truth and beauty. Success prompts to exertion, and habit facilitates success. It is idle to suppose we can exhaust

nature; and the more we employ our own faculties, the more we strengthen them and enrich our stores of observation and invention. The more we do, the more we *can* do. Not, indeed, if we *get our ideas out of our own heads*—that stock is soon exhausted, and we recur to tiresome, vapid imitations of ourselves. But this is the difference between real and mock talent, between genius and affectation. Nature is not limited, nor does it become effete, like our conceit and vanity. The closer we examine it, the more it refines upon us; it expands as we enlarge and shift our view; it “grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength.” The subjects are endless; and our capacity is invigorated as it is called out by occasion and necessity. He who does nothing renders himself incapable of doing anything; but while we are executing any work, we are preparing and qualifying ourselves to undertake another. The principles are the same in all nature; and we understand them better as we verify them by experience and practice. It is not as if there were a given number of subjects to work upon, or a set of *innate* or preconceived ideas in our minds which we encroached upon with every new design; the subjects, as I said before, are endless, and we acquire ideas by imparting them. Our expenditure of intellectual wealth makes us rich: we can only be liberal as we have previously accumulated the means. By lying idle, as by standing still, we are confined to the same trite, narrow round of topics: by continuing our efforts, as by moving forwards in a road, we extend our views, and discover continually new tracts of country. Genius, like humanity, rusts for want of use.

Habit also gives promptness; and the soul of despatch is decision. One man may write a book or paint a picture while another is deliberating about the plan or the title-page. The great painters were able to do so much, because they knew exactly what they meant to do, and how to set about it. They were thoroughbred workmen, and were not learning their art while they were exercising it. One can do a great deal in a short time if one only knows how. Thus an author may become very voluminous who only employs an hour or two in a day in study. If he has once obtained, by habit and reflection, a use of his pen, with plenty of materials to work upon, the pages vanish before him. The time lost is in beginning, or in stopping after we have begun. If we only go forward with spirit and confidence, we shall soon arrive at the end of our journey. A practised writer ought never to hesitate for a sentence from the moment he sets pen to paper, or think about the course he is to take. He must trust to his previous knowledge of the subject and to his immediate impulses, and he will get to the close of his task without accidents or loss of



time. I can easily understand how the old divines and controversialists produced their folios: I could write folios myself, if I rose early and sat up late at this kind of occupation. But I confess I should soon be tired of it, besides wearying the reader.

In one sense, art is long and life is short. In another sense, this aphorism is not true. The best of us are idle half our time. It is wonderful how much is done in a short space, provided we set about it properly, and give our minds wholly to it. Let any one devote himself to any art or science ever so strenuously, and he will still have leisure to make considerable progress in half-a-dozen other acquirements. Leonardo da Vinci was a mathematician, a musician, a poet, and an anatomist, besides being one of the greatest painters of his age. The Prince of Painters was a courtier, a lover, and fond of dress and company. Michael Angelo was a prodigy of versatility of talent—a writer of Sonnets (which Wordsworth has thought worth translating) and the admirer of Dante. Salvator was a lutenist and a satirist. Titian was an elegant letter-writer and a finished gentleman. Sir Joshua Reynolds's "Discourses" are more polished and classical even than any of his pictures. Let a man do all he can in any one branch of study, he must either exhaust himself and doze over it, or vary his pursuit, or else lie idle. All our real labour lies in a nutshell. The mind makes, at some period or other, one herculean effort, and the rest is mechanical. We have to climb a steep and narrow precipice at first; but after that the way is broad and easy, where we may drive several accomplishments abreast. Men should have one principal pursuit, which may be both agreeably and advantageously diversified with other lighter ones, as the subordinate parts of a picture may be managed so as to give effect to the centre group. It has been observed by a sensible man, that the having a regular occupation or professional duties to attend to is no excuse for putting forth an inelegant or inaccurate work; for a habit of industry braces and strengthens the mind, and enables it to wield its energies with additional ease and steadier purpose. Were I allowed to instance in myself, if what I write at present is worth nothing, at least it costs me nothing. But it cost me a great deal twenty years ago. I have added little to my stock since then, and taken little from it. I "unfold the book and volume of the brain," and transcribe the characters I see there as mechanically as any one might copy the letters in a sampler. I do not say they came there mechanically—I transfer them to the paper mechanically. After eight or ten years' hard study, an author (at least) may go to sleep. . . .

## THE SPIRIT OF OBLIGATIONS.

. . . I LIKE real good-nature and good-will, better than I do any offers of patronage or plausible rules for my conduct in life. I may suspect the soundness of the last, and I may not be quite sure of the motives of the first. People complain of ingratitude for benefits, and of the neglect of wholesome advice. In the first place, we pay little attention to advice, because we are seldom thought of in it. The person who gives it either contents himself to lay down (*ex cathedra*) certain vague, general maxims and "wise saws," which we knew before, or, instead of considering what we *ought to do*, recommends what he himself *would do*. He merely substitutes his own will, caprice, and prejudices for ours, and expects us to be guided by them. Instead of changing places with us (to see what is best to be done in the given circumstances), he insists on our looking at the question from his point of view, and acting in such a manner as to please him. This is not at all reasonable; for *one man's meat*, according to the old adage, *is another man's poison*. And it is not strange, that, starting from such opposite premises, we should seldom jump in a conclusion, and that the art of giving and taking advice is little better than a game at cross-purposes. I have observed that those who are the most inclined to assist others are the least forward or peremptory with their advice; for, having our interest really at heart, they consider what can, rather than what *cannot* be done, and aid our views and endeavour to avert ill-consequences by moderating our impatience and allaying irritations, instead of thwarting our main design, which only tends to make us more extravagant and violent than ever. In the second place, benefits are often conferred out of ostentation or pride, rather than from true regard; and the person obliged is too apt to perceive this. People who are fond of appearing in the light of patrons will perhaps go through fire and water to serve you, who yet would be sorry to find you no longer wanted their assistance, and whose friendship cools and their good-will slackens, as you are relieved by their active zeal from the necessity of being further beholden to it. Compassion and generosity are their favourite virtues; and they countenance you as you afford them opportunities for exercising them. The instant you can go alone, or can stand upon your own ground, you are discarded as unfit for their purpose.

This is something more than mere good-nature or humanity. A thoroughly good-natured man, a real friend, is one who is pleased at

our good-fortune, as well as prompt to seize every occasion of relieving our distress. We apportion our gratitude accordingly. We are thankful for good-will rather than for services, for the motive than the *quantum* of favour received—a kind word or look is never forgotten, while we cancel prouder and weightier obligations; and those who esteem us or evince a partiality to us are those whom we still consider as our best friends. Nay, so strong is this feeling, that we extend it even to those counterfeits in friendship—flatterers and sycophants. Our self-love, rather than our self-interest, is the master-key to our affections. . . .

There are different modes of obligation, and different avenues to our gratitude and favour. A man may lend his countenance who will not part with his money, and open his mind to us who will not draw out his purse. How many ways are there in which our peace may be assailed besides actual want! How many comforts do we stand in need of besides meat and drink and clothing! Is it nothing to “administer to a mind diseased”—to heal a wounded spirit? After all other difficulties are removed, we still want some one to bear with our infirmities, to impart our confidence to, to encourage us in our *hobbies* (nay, to get up and ride behind us), and to like us with all our faults. True friendship is self-love at second hand; where, as in a flattering mirror, we may see our virtues magnified and our errors softened, and where we may fancy our opinion of ourselves confirmed by an impartial and faithful witness. He (of all the world) creeps closest to our bosoms, into our favour and esteem, who thinks of us most nearly as we do of ourselves. Such a one is indeed the pattern of a friend, another self—and our gratitude for the blessing is as sincere as it is hollow in most other cases! This is one reason why entire friendship is scarcely to be found except in love. There is a hardness and severity in our judgments of one another; the spirit of competition also intervenes, unless where there is too great an inequality of pretension or difference of taste to admit of mutual sympathy and respect; but a woman’s vanity is interested in making the object of her choice the god of her idolatry; and in the intercourse with that sex, there is the finest balance and reflection of opposite and answering excellences imaginable! . . .

The difference of age, of situation in life, and an absence of all considerations of business have, I apprehend, something of the same effect in producing a refined and abstracted friendship. The person whose doors I enter with most pleasure, and quit with most regret, never did me the smallest favour. I once did him an uncalled-for service, and we nearly quarrelled about it. If I were in the utmost

distress, I should just as soon think of asking his assistance as of stopping a person on the highway. Practical benevolence is not his *forte*. He leaves the profession of that to others. His habits, his theory, are against it as idle and vulgar. His hand is closed, but what of that? His eye is ever open, and reflects the universe: his silver accents, beautiful, venerable as his silver hairs, but not scantied, flow as a river. I never ate or drank in his house; nor do I know or care how the flies or spiders fare in it, or whether a mouse can get a living. But I know that I can get there what I get nowhere else—a welcome, as if one was expected to drop in just at that moment, a total absence of all respect of persons and of airs of self-consequence, endless topics of discourse, refined thoughts, made more striking by ease and simplicity of manner—the husk, the shell of humanity is left at the door, and the spirit, mellowed by time, resides within! All you have to do is to sit and listen; and it is like hearing one of Titian's faces speak. To think of worldly matters is a profanation, like that of the money-changers in the Temple; or it is to regard the bread and wine of the Sacrament with carnal eyes. We enter the enchanter's cell, and converse with the divine inhabitant. To have this privilege always at hand, and to be circled by that spell whenever we choose with an "*Enter Sessami*," is better than sitting at the lower end of the tables of the great, than eating awkwardly from gold plate, than drinking fulsome toasts, or being thankful for gross favours, and gross insults!

#### WHETHER GENIUS IS CONSCIOUS OF ITS POWERS.

. . . THERE are two persons who always appear to me to have worked under this involuntary, silent impulse more than any others; I mean Rembrandt and Correggio. It is not known that Correggio ever saw a picture of any great master. He lived and died obscurely in an obscure village. We have few of his works, but they are all perfect. What truth, what grace, what angelic sweetness are there! Not one line or tone that is not divinely soft or exquisitely fair; the painter's mind rejecting, by a natural process, all that is discordant, coarse, or unpleasing. The whole is an emanation of pure thought. The work grew under his hand as if of itself, and came out without a flaw, like the diamond from the rock. He knew not what he did; and looked at each modest grace as it stole from the canvas with anxious delight and wonder. Ah, gracious God! not he alone; how many more in all time have looked at their works

with the same feelings, not knowing but they too may have done something divine, immortal, and finding in that sole doubt ample amends for pining solitude, for want, neglect, and an untimely fate! Oh! for one hour of that uneasy rapture, when the mind first thinks that it has struck out something that may last for ever; when the germ of excellence bursts from nothing on the startled sight! Take, take away the gaudy triumphs of the world, the long deathless shout of fame, and give back that heartfelt sigh with which the youthful enthusiasts first wed immortality as his secret bride! And thou too, Rembrandt! Thou wert a man of genius, if ever painter was a man of genius!—did this dream hang over you as you painted that strange picture of “Jacob’s Ladder”? Did your eye strain over those gradual dusky clouds into futurity, or did those white-vested, beaked figures babble to you of fame as they approached? Did you know what you were about, or did you not paint much as it happened? Oh! if you had thought once about yourself or anything but the subject, it would have been all over with “the glory, the intuition, the amenity,” the dream had fled, the spell had been broken. The hills would not have looked like those we see in sleep—that tatterdemalion figure of Jacob, thrown on one side, would not have slept as if the breath was fairly taken out of his body. So much do Rembrandt’s pictures savour of the soul and body of reality, that the thoughts seem identical with the objects—if there had been the least question what he should have done, or how he should do it, or how far he had succeeded, it would have spoiled everything. Lumps of light hung upon his pencil and fell upon his canvas like dewdrops: the shadowy veil was drawn over his backgrounds by the dull, obtuse finger of night, making darkness visible by still greater darkness that could only be felt! . . .

The greatest pleasure in life is that of reading, while we are young. I have had as much of this pleasure as perhaps any one. As I grow older it fades; or else, the stronger stimulus of writing takes off the edge of it. At present, I have neither time nor inclination for it: yet I should like to devote a year’s entire leisure to a course of the English Novelists; and perhaps clap on that sly old knave, Sir Walter, to the end of the list. It is astonishing how I used formerly to relish the style of certain authors, at a time when I myself despaired of ever writing a single line. Probably this was the reason. It is not in mental as in natural ascent—intellectual objects seem higher when we survey them from below, than when we look down from any given elevation above the common level. My three favourite writers about the time I speak of were Burke, Junius, and Rousseau. I was never weary of admiring and wondering at the

felicities of the style, the turns of expression, the refinements of thought and sentiment: I laid the book down to find out the secret of so much strength and beauty, and took it up again in despair, to read on and admire. So I passed whole days, months, and, I may add, years; and have only this to say now, that as my life began, so I could wish that it may end. The last time I tasted this luxury in its full perfection was one day after a sultry day's walk in summer between Farnham and Alton. I was fairly tired out; I walked into an inn-yard (I think at the latter place); I was shown by the waiter to what looked at first like common outhouses at the other end of it, but they turned out to be a suite of rooms, probably a hundred years old. The one I entered opened into an old-fashioned garden, embellished with beds of larkspur and a leaden Mercury; it was wainscoted, and there was a grave-looking, dark-coloured portrait of Charles II. hanging over the tiled chimney-piece. I had "Love for Love"<sup>1</sup> in my pocket, and began to read; coffee was brought in in a silver coffee-pot; the cream, the bread and butter, everything was excellent, and the flavour of Congreve's style prevailed over all. I prolonged the entertainment till a late hour, and relished this divine comedy better even than when I used to see it played by Miss Mellon, as *Miss Prue*; Bob Palmer, as *Tattle*; and Bannister, as honest *Ben*. This circumstance happened just five years ago, and it seems like yesterday. If I count my life so by lustres, it will soon glide away; yet I shall not have to repine, if, while it lasts, it is enriched with a few such recollections!

## PRIDE.

[From the Essay "On Egotism."]

. . . I CAN conceive of nothing so little or so ridiculous as pride. It is a mixture of insensibility and ill-nature, in which it is hard to say which has the largest share. If a man knows or excels in, or has ever studied, any two things, I will venture to affirm he will be proud of neither. It is perhaps excusable for a person who is ignorant of all but one thing, to think *that* the sole excellence, and to be full of himself as the possessor. The way to cure him of this folly is to give him something else to be proud of. Vanity is a building that falls to the ground as you widen its foundation, or strengthen the props that should support it. The greater a man is, the less he necessarily thinks of himself, for his knowledge enlarges with his attainments. In himself he feels that he is nothing, a point, a speck in the

<sup>1</sup> Congreve's play.—ED.

universe, except as his mind reflects that universe, and as he enters into the infinite variety of truth, beauty, and power contained in it. Let any one be brought up among books, and taught to think words the only things, and he may conceive highly of himself from the proficiency he has made in language and in letters. Let him then be compelled to attempt some other pursuit—painting, for instance—and be made to feel the difficulties, the refinements of which it is capable, and the number of things of which he was utterly ignorant before, and there will be an end of his pedantry and his pride together. Nothing but the want of comprehension of view or generosity of spirit can make any one fix on his own particular acquirement as the limit of all excellence. No one is (generally speaking) great in more than one thing—if he extends his pursuits, he dissipates his strength—yet in that one thing how small is the interval between him and the next in merit and reputation to himself! But he thinks nothing of, or scorns or loathes the name of his rival, so that all that the other possesses in common goes for nothing, and the fraction of a difference between them constitutes (in his opinion) the sum and substance of all that is excellent in the universe! Let a man be wise, and then let us ask, Will his wisdom make him proud? Let him excel all others in the graces of the mind, has he also those of the body? He has the advantage of fortune, but has he also that of birth? or if he has both, has he health, strength, beauty, in a supreme degree? Or have not others the same? or does he think all these nothing because he does not possess them? The proud man fancies that there is no one worth regarding but himself: he might as well fancy there is no other being but himself. The one is not a greater stretch of madness than the other. To make pride justifiable, there ought to be but one proud man in the world, for if any one individual has a right to be so, nobody else has. So far from thinking ourselves superior to all the rest of the species, we cannot be sure that we are above the meanest and most despised individual of it: for he may have some virtue, some excellence, some source of happiness or usefulness within himself, which may redeem all other disadvantages: or even if he is without any such hidden worth, this is not a subject of exultation, but of regret, to any one tinctured with the smallest humanity, and he who is totally devoid of the latter cannot have much reason to be proud of anything else. Arkwright, who invented the spinning-jenny, for many years kept a paltry barber's shop in a provincial town: yet at that time that wonderful machinery was working in his brain, which has added more to the wealth and resources of this country than all the pride of ancestry

or insolence of upstart nobility for the last hundred years. We should be cautious whom we despise. If we do not know them, we can have no right to pronounce a hasty sentence: if we do, they may espy some few defects in us. *No man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre.* What is it, then, that makes the difference? The dress and pride. But he is the most of a hero who is least distinguished by the one and most free from the other. If we enter into conversation upon equal terms with the lowest of the people, unrestrained by circumstance, unawed by interest, we shall find in ourselves but little superiority over them. If we know what they do not, they know what we do not. In general, those who do things for others, know more about them than those for whom they are done. A groom knows more about horses than his master. He rides them too: but the one rides behind, the other before! Hence the number of forms and ceremonies that have been invented to keep the magic circle of fancied self-importance inviolate. The late King sought but one interview with Dr. Johnson: his present Majesty is never tired of the company of Mr. Croker.

### ON READING OLD BOOKS.

... I do not think altogether the worse of a book for having survived the author a generation or two. I have more confidence in the dead than the living. Contemporary writers may generally be divided into two classes—one's friends or one's foes. Of the first we are compelled to think too well, and of the last we are disposed to think too ill, to receive much genuine pleasure from the perusal, or to judge fairly of the merits of either. One candidate for literary fame, who happens to be of our acquaintance, writes finely, and like a man of genius; but unfortunately has a foolish face, which spoils a delicate passage:—another inspires us with the highest respect for his personal talents and character, but does not quite come up to our expectations in print. All these contradictions and petty details interrupt the calm current of our reflections. If you want to know what any of the authors were who lived before our time, and are still objects of anxious inquiry, you have only to look into their works. But the dust and smoke and noise of modern literature have nothing in common with the pure, silent air of immortality.

When I take up a work that I have read before (the oftener the better) I know what I have to expect. The satisfaction is not lessened by being anticipated. When the entertainment is



altogether new, I sit down to it as I should to a strange dish,—turn and pick out a bit here and there, and am in doubt what to think of the composition. There is a want of confidence and security to second appetite. New-fangled books are also like made-dishes in this respect, that they are generally little else than hashes and *rifaccimenti* of what has been served up entire and in a more natural state at other times. Besides, in thus turning to a well-known author, there is not only an assurance that my time will not be thrown away, or my palate nauseated with the most insipid or vilest trash,—but I shake hands with, and look an old, tried, and valued friend in the face,—compare notes, and chat the hours away. It is true, we form dear friendships with such ideal guests—dearer, alas! and more lasting, than those with our most intimate acquaintance. In reading a book which is an old favourite with me (say the first novel I ever read) I not only have the pleasure of imagination and of a critical relish of the work, but the pleasures of memory added to it. It recalls the same feelings and associations which I had in first reading it, and which I can never have again in any other way. Standard productions of this kind are links in the chain of our conscious being. They bind together the different scattered divisions of our personal identity. They are landmarks and guides in our journey through life. They are pegs and loops on which we can hang up, or from which we can take down, at pleasure, the wardrobe of a moral imagination, the relics of our best affections, the tokens and records of our happiest hours. They are “for thoughts and for remembrance!” They are like Fortunatus’s Wishing-Cap—they give us the best riches—those of Fancy; and transport us, not over half the globe, but (which is better) over half our lives, at a word’s notice!

My father Shandy solaced himself with *Bruscombille*. Give me for this purpose a volume of “*Peregrine Pickle*” or “*Tom Jones*.” Open either of them anywhere—at the “*Memoirs of Lady Vane*,” or the adventures at the masquerade with Lady Bellaston, or the disputes between Thwackum and Square, or the escape of Molly Seagrim, or the incident of Sophia and her muff, or the edifying prolixity of her aunt’s lecture—and there I find the same delightful, busy, bustling scene as ever, and feel myself the same as when I was first introduced into the midst of it. Nay, sometimes the sight of an odd volume of these good old English authors on a stall, or the name lettered on the back among others on the shelves of a library, answers the purpose, revives the whole train of ideas, and sets “the puppets dallying.” Twenty years are struck off the list, and I am a child again. A sage philosopher, who was not a very wise man, said,

that he should like very well to be young again, if he could take his experience along with him. This ingenious person did not seem to be aware, by the gravity of his remark, that the great advantage of being young is to be without this weight of experience, which he would fain place upon the shoulders of youth, and which never comes too late with years. Oh! what a privilege to be able to let this hump, like Christian's burthen, drop from off one's back, and transport oneself, by the help of a little musty duodecimo, to the time when "ignorance was bliss," and when we first got a peep at the raree-show of the world, through the glass of fiction—gazing at mankind, as we do at wild beasts in a menagerie, through the bars of their cages,—or at curiosities in a museum, that we must not touch! For myself, not only are the old ideas of the contents of the work brought back to my mind in all their vividness, but the old associations of the faces and persons of those I then knew, as they were in their lifetime—the place where I sat to read the volume, the day when I got it, the feeling of the air, the fields, the sky—return, and all my early impressions with them. This is better to me—those places, those times, those persons, and those feelings that come across me as I retrace the story and devour the page are to me better far than the wet sheets of the last new novel from the Ballantyne press, to say nothing of the Minerva press in Leadenhall Street. It is like visiting the scenes of early youth. I think of the time "when I was in my father's house, and my path ran down with butter and honey,"—when I was a little thoughtless child, and had no other wish or care but to con my daily task and be happy!—"Tom Jones," I remember, was the first work that broke the spell. It came down in numbers once a fortnight, in Cooke's pocket-edition, embellished with cuts. I had hitherto read only in school-books, and a tiresome ecclesiastical history (with the exception of Mrs Radcliffe's "Romance of the Forest"): but this had a different relish with it,—“sweet in the mouth,” though not “bitter in the belly.” It smacked of the world I lived in, and in which I was to live—and showed me groups, “gay creatures” not “of the element,” but of the earth; not “living in the clouds,” but travelling the same road that I did;—some that had passed on before me, and others that might soon overtake me. My heart had palpitated at the thoughts of a boarding-school ball, or gala-day at Midsummer or Christmas: but the world I had found out in Cooke's edition of the “British Novelists” was to me a dance through life, a perpetual gala-day. The sixpenny numbers of this work regularly contrived to leave off just in the middle of a sentence, and in the nick of a story. With what eagerness I used to look forward to the next number,

and open the prints! Ah! never again shall I feel the enthusiastic delight with which I gazed at the figures, and anticipated the story and adventures of Major Bath and Commodore Trunnion, of Trim and my Uncle Toby, of Don Quixote and Sancho and Dapple, of Gil Blas and Dame Lorenza Sephora, of Laura and the fair Lucretia, whose lips open and shut like buds of roses. To what nameless ideas did they give rise,—with what airy delights I filled up the outlines, as I hung in silence over the page!—Let me still recall them, that they may breathe fresh life into me, and that I may live that birthday of thought and romantic pleasure over again! Talk of the *ideal*! This is the only true ideal—the heavenly tints of Fancy reflected in the bubbles that float upon the spring-tide of human life.

“O Memory! shield me from the world’s poor strife,  
And give those scenes thine everlasting life!”

. . . I remember, as long ago as the year 1798, going to a neighbouring town (Shrewsbury, where Farquhar has laid the plot of his “Recruiting Officer”), and bringing home with me, “at one proud swoop,” a copy of Milton’s “Paradise Lost,” and another of Burke’s “Reflections on the French Revolution”—both which I have still; and I still recollect, when I see the covers, the pleasure with which I dipped into them as I returned with my double prize. I was set up for one while. That time is past “with all its giddy raptures:” but I am still anxious to preserve its memory, “embalmed with odours.” . . . Again, as to the other work, Burke’s “Reflections,” I took a particular pride and pleasure in it, and read it to myself and others for months afterwards. I had reason for my prejudice in favour of this author. To understand an adversary is some praise: to admire him is more. I thought I did both: I knew I did one. From the first time I ever cast my eyes on anything of Burke’s (which was an extract from his “Letter to a Noble Lord” in a three-times-a-week paper, the *St. James’s Chronicle*, in 1796), I said to myself, “This is true eloquence: this is a man pouring out his mind on paper.” All other style seemed to me pedantic and impertinent. Dr. Johnson’s was walking on stilts; and even Junius’s (who was at that time a favourite with me), with all his terseness, shrank up into little antithetic points and well-trimmed sentences. But Burke’s style was forked and playful as the lightning, crested like the serpent. He delivered plain things on a plain ground; but when he rose, there was no end of his flights and circumgyrations—and in this very Letter, “he, like an eagle in a dovecot, fluttered *his* Volscians” (the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale) “in Corioli.” I

did not care for his doctrines. I was then, and am still, proof against their contagion; but I admired the author, and was considered as not a very staunch partisan of the opposite side, though I thought myself that an abstract proposition was one thing—a masterly transition, a brilliant metaphor, another. I conceived, too, that he might be wrong in his main argument, and yet deliver fifty truths in arriving at a false conclusion. I remember Coleridge assuring me, as a poetical and political set-off to my sceptical admiration, that Wordsworth had written an “*Essay on Marriage*,” which, for manly thought and nervous expression, he deemed incomparably superior. As I had not, at that time, seen any specimens of Mr. Wordsworth’s prose style, I could not express my doubts on the subject. If there are greater prose-writers than Burke, they either lie out of my course of study or are beyond my sphere of comprehension. I am too old to be a convert to a new mythology of genius. The niches are occupied, the tables are full. If such is still my admiration of this man’s misapplied powers, what must it have been at a time when I myself was in vain trying, year after year, to write a single essay, nay, a single page or sentence; when I regarded the wonders of his pen with the longing eyes of one who was dumb and a changeling; and when to be able to convey the slightest conception of my meaning to others in words was the height of an almost hopeless ambition! But I never measured others’ excellences by my own defects: though a sense of my own incapacity, and of the steep, impassable ascent from me to them, made me regard them with greater awe and fondness. I have thus run through most of my early studies and favourite authors, some of whom I have since criticised more at large. Whether those observations will survive me, I neither know nor do I much care: but to the works themselves, “worthy of all acceptance,” and to the feelings they have always excited in me since I could distinguish a meaning in language, nothing shall ever prevent me from looking back with gratitude and triumph. To have lived in the cultivation of an intimacy with such works, and to have familiarly relished such names, is not to have lived quite in vain.

There are other authors whom I have never read, and yet whom I have frequently had a great desire to read, from some circumstance relating to them. Among these is Lord Clarendon’s “*History of the Grand Rebellion*,” after which I have a hankering, from hearing it spoken of by good judges, from my interest in the events, and knowledge of the characters from other sources, and from having seen fine portraits of most of them. I like to read a well-penned character, and Clarendon is said to have been a master in his way.

I should like to read Froissart's "Chronicles," Holinshed and Stowe, and Fuller's "Worthies." I intend, whenever I can, to read Beaumont and Fletcher all through. There are fifty-two of their plays, and I have only read a dozen or fourteen of them. "A Wife for a Month" and "Thierry and Theodoret" are, I am told, delicious, and I can believe it. I should like to read the speeches in "Thucydides," and Guicciardini's "History of Florence," and "Don Quixote" in the original. I have often thought of reading the "Loves of Persiles and Sigismunda," and the "Galatea" of the same author. But I somehow reserve them like "another Yarrow." I should also like to read the last new novel (if I could be sure it was so) of the author of "Waverley:"—no one would be more glad than I to find it the best!

#### ON NOVELTY AND FAMILIARITY.

. . . THE best part of our lives we pass in counting on what is to come, or in fancying what may have happened in real or fictitious story to others. I have had more pleasure in reading the adventures of a novel (and perhaps changing situations with the hero) than I ever had in my own. I do not think any one can feel much happier—a greater degree of heart's ease—than I used to feel in reading "Tristram Shandy," and "Peregrine Pickle," and "Tom Jones," and the "Tatler," and "Gil Blas of Santillane," and "Werter," and "Boccaccio." It was some years after that I read the last, but his tales

"Dallied with the innocence of love,  
Like the old Time."

The story of Frederigo Alberigi affected me as if it had been my own case, and I saw his hawk upon her perch in the clear, cold air, "and how fat and fair a bird she was," as plain as ever I saw a picture of Titian's; and felt that I should have served her up as he did, as a banquet for his mistress, who came to visit him at his own poor farm. I could wish that Lord Byron had employed himself while in Italy in rescuing such a writer as Boccaccio from unmerited obloquy, instead of making those notable discoveries—that Pope was a poet, and that Shakspeare was not one! Mrs. Inchbald was always a great favourite with me. There is the true soul of woman breathing from what she writes, as much as if you heard her voice. It is as if Venus had written books. I first read her "Simple Story" (of all places in the world) at M——. No matter where it was; for it transported me out of myself. I recollect walking out

to escape from one of the tenderest parts, in order to return to it again with double relish. An old crazy hand-organ was playing "Robin Adair;" a summer-shower dropped manna on my head, and slaked my feverish thirst of happiness. Her heroine, Miss Milner, was at my side. My dream has since been verified:—how like it was to the reality! In truth, the reality itself was but a dream. Do I not still see that "simple movement of her finger" with which Madam Basil beckoned Jean Jacques to the seat at her feet, the heightened colour that tinged her profile as she sat at her work netting, the bunch of flowers in her hair? Is not the glow of youth and beauty in her cheek blended with the blushes of the roses in her hair? Do they not breathe the breath of love? And (what though the adventure was unfinished by either writer or reader?) is not the blank filled up with the rare and subtle spirit of fancy, that imparts the fulness of delight to the air-drawn creations of brain? I once sat on a sunny bank in a field in which the green blades of corn waved in the fitful northern breeze, and read the letter in the "New Eloise" in which St. Preux describes the Pays de Vaud. I never felt what Shakspeare calls my "glassy essence" so much as then. My thoughts were pure and free. They took a tone from the objects before me, and from the simple manners of the inhabitants of mountain-scenery so well described in the letter. The style gave me the same sensation as the drops of morning dew before they are scorched by the sun; and I thought Julia did well to praise it. I wished I could have written such a letter. That wish, enhanced by my admiration of genius and the feeling of the objects around me, was accompanied with more pleasure than if I had written fifty such letters, or had gained all the reputation of its immortal author! Of all the pictures, prints, or drawings I ever saw, none ever gave me such satisfaction as the rude etchings at the top of Rousseau's "Confessions." There is a necromatic spell in the outlines. Imagination is a witch. It is not even said anywhere that such is the case, but I had got it into my head that the rude sketches of old-fashioned houses, stone-walls, and stumps of trees represented the scenes at Annecy and Vevay, where he who relished all more sharply than others, and by his own intense aspirations after good had nearly delivered mankind from the yoke of evil, first drew the breath of hope. Here love's golden rigol bound his brows, and here fell from it. It was the partition-wall between life and death to him, and all beyond it was a desert! . . .

"And bade the lovely scenes at distance hail."

I used to apply this line to the distant range of hills in a paltry

landscape, which, however, had a tender vernal tone and a dewy freshness. I could look at them till my eyes filled with tears and my heart dissolved in faintness. Why do I recall the circumstance after a lapse of years with so much interest? Because I felt it then. Those feeble outlines were linked in my mind to the purest, fondest yearnings after good; that dim, airy space contained my little all of hope, buoyed up by charming fears; the delight with which I dwelt upon it, enhanced by my ignorance of what was in store for me, was free from mortal grossness, familiarity, or disappointment, and I drank pleasure out of the bosom of the silent hills and gleaming valleys as from a cup filled to the brim with love-philtres and poisonous sweetness by the sorceress Fancy!

### ON OLD ENGLISH WRITERS AND SPEAKERS.

THE expression in Holbein's pictures conveys a faithful but not very favourable notion of the literary character of that period. It is painful, dry, and laboured. Learning was then an ascetic, but recluse and profound. You see a weight of thought and care in the studious heads of the time of the Reformation, a sincerity, an integrity, a sanctity of purpose, like that of a formal dedication to a religious life or the inviolability of monastic vows. They had their work to do; we reap the benefits of it. We skim the surface, and travel along the high-road. They had to explore dark recesses, to dig through mountains, and make their way through pathless wildernesses. It is no wonder they looked grave upon it. The seriousness, indeed, amounts to an air of devotion; and it has to me something fine, manly, and *old English* about it. There is a heartiness and determined resolution; a willingness to contend with opposition; a superiority to ease and pleasure; some sullen pride, but no trifling vanity. They addressed themselves to study as to a duty, and were ready to "leave all and follow it." In the beginning of such an era, the difference between ignorance and learning, between what was commonly known and what was possible to be known, would appear immense; and no pains or time would be thought too great to master the difficulty. Conscious of their own deficiencies and the scanty information of those about them, they would be glad to look out for aids and support, and to put themselves apprentices to time and nature. This temper would lead them to exaggerate rather than to make light of the difficulties of their undertaking, and would call forth sacrifices in proportion. Feeling how little they knew, they would be anxious to discover all that others had

known, and instead of making a display of themselves, their first object would be to dispel the mist and darkness that surrounded them. They did not cull the flowers of learning, or pluck a leaf of laurel for their own heads, but tugged at the roots and very heart of their subject, as the woodman tugs at the roots of the gnarled oak. The sense of the arduousness of their enterprise braced their courage, so that they left nothing half-done. They inquired *de omne scibile et quibusdam aliis*. They ransacked libraries, they exhausted authorities. They acquired languages, consulted books, and deciphered manuscripts. They devoured learning, and swallowed antiquity whole, and (what is more) digested it. They read incessantly, and remembered what they read, from the zealous interest they took in it. Repletion is only bad when it is accompanied with apathy and want of exercise. They laboured hard, and showed great activity both of reasoning and speculation. Their fault was, that they were too prone to unlock the secrets of nature with the key of learning, and often to substitute authority in the place of argument. They were also too polemical, as was but naturally to be expected in the first breaking-up of established prejudices and opinions. It is curious to observe the slow progress of the human mind in loosening and getting rid of its trammels, link by link, and how it crept on its hands and feet, and with its eyes bent on the ground, out of the cave of Bigotry, making its way through one dark passage after another; those who gave up one half of an absurdity contending as strenuously for the remaining half, the lazy current of tradition stemming the tide of innovation, and making an endless struggle between the two. But in the dullest minds of this period there was a deference to the opinions of their leaders; an imposing sense of the importance of the subject, of the necessity of bringing all the faculties to bear upon it; a weight either of armour or of internal strength, a zeal either *for* or *against*; a head, a heart, and a hand, a holding out to the death for conscience' sake, a strong spirit of proselytism—no flippancy, no indifference, no compromising, no pert, shallow scepticism, but truth was supposed indissolubly knit to good, knowledge to usefulness, and the temporal and eternal welfare of mankind to hang in the balance. The pure springs of a lofty faith (so to speak) had not then descended by various gradations from their skyey regions and cloudy height, to find their level in the smooth, glittering expanse of modern philosophy, or to settle in the stagnant pool of stale hypocrisy! A learned man of that day, if he knew no better than others, at least knew all that they did. He did not come to his subject, like some dapper barrister who has never looked at his brief, and trusts to the smartness of his wit and person for



the agreeable effect he means to produce, but like an old and practised counsellor, covered over with the dust and cobwebs of the law. If it was a speaker in Parliament, he came prepared to handle his subject, armed with cases and precedents, the constitution and history of Parliament from the earliest period, a knowledge of the details of business and the local interests of the country; in short, he had taken up *the freedom of the House*, and did not treat the question like a cosmopolite or a writer in a magazine. If it were a divine, he knew the Scriptures and the Fathers, and the Councils and the Commentators, by heart, and thundered them in the ears of his astonished audience. Not a trim essay or a tumid oration, patronising religion by modern sophisms, but the Law and the Prophets, the chapter and the verse. If it was a philosopher, Aristotle and the Schoolmen were drawn out in battle-array against you:—if an antiquarian, the Lord bless us! There is a passage in Selden's notes on Drayton's "*Poly-Olbion*," in which he elucidates some point of topography by a reference not only to Stowe, and Holinshed, and Camden, and Saxo-Grammaticus, and Dugdale, and several other authors that we are acquainted with, but to twenty obscure names, that no modern reader ever heard of; and so on through the notes to a folio volume, written apparently for relaxation. Such were the intellectual amusements of our ancestors! Learning then ordinarily lay-in of folio volumes: now she litters octavos and duodecimos, and will soon, as in France, miscarry of half-sheets! Poor Job Orton! Why should I not record a jest of his (perhaps the only one he ever made), emblematic as it is of the living and the learning of the good old times? The Rev. Job Orton was a Dissenting minister in the middle of the last century, and had grown heavy and gouty by sitting long at dinner and at his studies. He could only get downstairs at last by spreading the folio volumes of Caryl's "*Commentaries upon Job*" on the steps and sliding down them. Surprised one day in his descent, he exclaimed, "You have often heard of Caryl upon Job—now you see Job upon Caryl!" This same quaint-witted gouty old gentleman seems to have been one of those "superior, happy spirits" who slid through life on the rollers of learning, enjoying the good things of the world and laughing at them, and turning his infirmities to a livelier account than his patriarchal namesake. Reader, didst thou ever hear either of Job Orton or of Caryl on Job? I dare say not. Yet the one did not therefore slide down his theological staircase the less pleasantly; nor did the other compile his *Commentaries* in vain! For myself, I should like to browse on folios, and have to deal chiefly with authors that I have scarcely strength to lift, that are as solid as

they are heavy, and if dull, are full of matter. It is delightful to repose on the wisdom of the ancients; to have some great name at hand, besides one's own initials always staring one in the face; to travel out of oneself into the Chaldee, Hebrew, and Egyptian characters; to have the palm-trees waving mystically in the margin of the page, and the camels moving slowly on in the distance of three thousand years. In that dry desert of learning we gather strength and patience, and a strange and insatiable thirst of knowledge. The ruined monuments of antiquity are also there, and the fragments of buried cities (under which the adder lurks), and cool springs, and green sunny spots, and the whirlwind, and the lion's roar, and the shadow of angelic wings. To those who turn with supercilious disgust from the ponderous tomes of scholastic learning, who never felt the witchery of the Talmuds and the Cabbala, of the Commentators and the Schoolmen, of texts and authorities, of types and antitypes, hieroglyphics and mysteries, dogmas and contradictions, and endless controversies and doubtful labyrinths, and quaint traditions, I would recommend the lines of Warton written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's "Monasticon:"

"Deem not devoid of elegance the sage,  
By fancy's genuine feelings unbeguiled,  
Of painful pedantry the poring child,  
Who turns of these proud tomes the historic page,  
Now sunk by time and Henry's fiercer rage.  
Think'st thou the warbling Muses never smiled  
On his lone hours? Ingenious views engage  
His thoughts, on themes (unclassic falsely styled)  
Intent. While cloister'd piety displays  
Her mouldering scroll, the piercing eye explores  
New manners and the pomp of elder days;  
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictured stores.  
Nor rough nor barren are the winding ways  
Of hoar Antiquity, but strewn with flowers."

## IDENTITY OF THE AUTHOR WITH HIS BOOKS.

[From the Essay "On the Jealousy and the Spleen of Party."]

. . . **WHATEVER** the reader thinks fine in books assuredly existed before in the living volume of the author's brain: that which is a passing and casual impression in the one case, a floating image, an empty sound, is in the other an heirloom of the mind, the very form into which it is warped and moulded, a deep and inward harmony that flows on for ever, as the springs of memory and imagination unlock

their secret stores. "Thoughts that glow and words that burn" are his daily sustenance. He leads a spiritual life, and walks with God. The personal is, as much as may be, lost in the universal. He is Nature's high-priest, and his mind is a temple where she treasures up her fairest and loftiest forms. These he broods over, till he becomes enamoured of them, inspired by them, and communicates some portion of his ethereal fires to others. For these he has given up everything, wealth, pleasure, ease, health; and yet we are to be told he takes no interest in them, does not enter into the meaning of the words he uses, or feel the force of the ideas he imprints upon the brain of others. *Let us give the devil his due.* An author, I grant, may be deficient in dress or address, may neglect his person and his fortune—

" But his soul is fair,  
Bright as the children of yon azure sheen : "

he may be full of inconsistencies elsewhere, but he is himself in his books: he may be ignorant of the world we live in, but that he is not at home and enchanted with that fairy-world which hangs upon his pen, that he does not reign and revel in the creations of his own fancy, or tread with awe and delight the stately domes and empyrean palaces of eternal truth, the portals of which he opens to us, is what I cannot take Mr. Moore's word for. He does not "give us reason with his rhyme." An author's appearance or his actions may not square with his theories or descriptions, but his mind is seen in his writings, as his face is in the glass. All the faults of the literary character, in short, arise out of the predominance of the professional *mania* of such persons, and their absorption in those *ideal* studies and pursuits, their affected regard to which the poet tells us is a mere mockery, and a barefaced insult to people of plain, straightforward, practical sense and unadorned pretensions, like himself. . . . In turning to the "Castle of Indolence" for the lines quoted a little way back, I chanced to light upon another passage which I cannot help transcribing:

" I care not, Fortune, what you me deny :  
You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace ;  
You cannot shut the windows of the sky,  
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face ;  
You cannot bar my constant feet to trace  
The woods and lawns by living stream at eve :  
Let health my nerves and finer fibres brace,  
And I their toys to the great children leave :  
Of fancy, reason, virtue, nought can me bereave. "

Were the sentiments here so beautifully expressed mere affectation

in Thomson, or are we to make it a rule that as a writer imparts to us a sensation of disinterested delight, he himself has none of the feeling he excites in us? This is one way of showing our gratitude, and being even with him.

“ Books, dreams are each a world, and books, we know,  
Are a substantial world, both pure and good ;  
Round which, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,  
Our pastime and our happiness may grow.”

Let me, then, conjure the gentle reader, who has ever felt an attachment to books, not hastily to divorce them from their authors. Whatever love or reverence may be due to the one is equally owing to the other. The volume we prize may be little, old, shabbily bound, an imperfect copy, does not step down from the shelf to give us a graceful welcome, nor can it extend a hand to serve us in extremity, and so far may be like the author; but whatever there is of truth or good, or of proud consolation or of cheering hope, in the one, all this existed in a greater degree in the imagination and the heart and brain of the other. To cherish the work and *damn* the author is as if the traveller who slakes his thirst at the running stream should revile the spring-head from which it gushes. I do not speak of the degree of passion felt by Rousseau towards Madame Warens, nor of his treatment of her, nor hers of him; but that he thought of her for years with the tenderest yearnings of affection and regret, and felt towards her all that he has made his readers feel, this I cannot for a moment doubt. So far, then, he is no impostor or juggler. Still less could he have given a new and personal character to the literature of Europe, and changed the tone of sentiment and the face of society, if he had not felt the strongest interest in persons and things, or had been the heartless pretender he is sometimes held out to us. . . .

## “VIVIAN GREY” AND THE DANDY SCHOOL.

[Appeared in the *Examiner*, November 18, 1827, under the head of *The Dandy School*.]

[It is a striking proof of Hazlitt's keen insight, that he so unerringly took the moral measure of the then unknown author of “Vivian Grey.” He detected at once the vulgar affectation of gentility, the selfishness, and disbelief in unselfish motives of action, the worship of success, the absence of all conception of true greatness, and the general self-seeking spirit which pervades the novel—contrasting its aims and those of kindred productions by Theodore Hook with the nobler ideals of such manly and healthy writers as Scott.]

. . . It was formerly understood to be the business of literature to enlarge the bounds of knowledge and feeling; to direct the mind's eye beyond the present moment and the present object; to plunge us in the world of romance, to connect different languages, manners, times together; to wean us from the grossness of sense, the illusions of self-love;—by the aid of imagination, to place us in the situations of others and enable us to feel an interest in all that strikes them; and to make books the faithful witnesses and interpreters of nature and the human heart. Of late, instead of this liberal and useful tendency, it has taken a narrower and more superficial tone. All that we learn from it is the servility, egotism, and upstart pretensions of the writers. Instead of transporting you to faery-land or into the *middle* ages, you take a turn down Bond Street or go through the mazes of the dance at Almack's. You have no new inlet to thought or feeling opened to you; but the passing object, the topic of the day (however insipid or repulsive), is served up to you with a self-sufficient air, as if you had not already had enough of it. You dip into an essay or a novel, and may fancy yourself reading a collection of quack or fashionable advertisements:—Macassar Oil, Eau de Cologne, Hock and Seltzer Water, Otto of Roses, *Pomade Divine*, glance through the page in inextricable confusion, and make your head giddy. Far from extending your sympathies, they are narrowed to a single point, the admiration of the folly, caprice, insolence, and affectation of a certain class;—so that, with the exception of people who ride in their carriages, you are taught to look down upon the rest of the species with indifference, abhorrence, or contempt. A schoolmaster in a black coat is a monster—a tradesman and his wife who eat cold mutton and pickled cab-

bage are wretches to be hunted out of society. That is the end and moral of it: it is part and parcel of a system. The *Dandy School* give the finishing-touch to the principles of paternal government. First comes the political sycophant, and makes the people over to their rulers as a property in perpetuity; but then they are to be handled tenderly, and need not complain, since the sovereign is the father of his people, and we are to be all one family of love. So says the "Austrian Catechism." Then comes the literary sycophant to finish what the other had begun; and the poor fools of people having been caught in the trap of plausible professions, he takes off the mask of *paternity*, treats them as of a different species instead of members of the same family, loads them with obloquy and insult, and laughs at the very idea of any fellow-feeling with or consideration towards them, as the height of bad taste, weakness, and vulgarity. So says Mr. Theodore Hook and the author of "Vivian Grey." So says not Sir Walter. Ever while you live, go to a man of genius in preference to a dunce; for, let his prejudices or his party be what they may, there is still a saving grace about him, for he himself has something else to trust to besides his subserviency to greatness to raise him from insignificance. He takes you and places you in a cottage or a cavern, and makes you feel the deepest interest in it, for you feel all that its inmates feel. The *Dandy School* tell you all that a dandy would feel in such circumstances, viz., that he was not in a drawing-room or at Long's. Or if he does forfeit his character for a moment, he at most brings himself to patronise humanity, condescends to the accidents of common life, touches the pathetic with his pen as if it were with a pair of tongs, and while he just deigns to notice the existence or endure the infirmities of his fellow-creatures, indemnifies his vanity by snatching a conscious glance at his own person and perfections. Whatever is going on, he himself is the hero of the scene; the distress (however excruciating) derives its chief claim to attention from the singular circumstance of his being present; and he manages the whole like a piece of private theatricals with an air of the most absolute *nonchalance* and decorum. The Whole Duty of Man is turned into a butt and by-word, or like Mr. Martin's Bill for humanity to animals, is a pure voluntary, a caprice of effeminate sensibility: the great business of life is a kind of masquerade or melodrama got up for effect and by particular desire of the Great. We soon grow tired of nature so treated, and are glad to turn to the follies and fopperies of high life, into which the writer enters with more relish, and where he finds himself more at home. So Mr. Croker (in his place in the House of Commons) does not know where Bloomsbury Square is:

thus affecting to level all the houses in the metropolis that are not at the Court-end, and leaving them tenantless by a paltry sneer, as if a plague had visited them. It is no wonder that his *protégés* and understrappers out of doors should echo this official impertinence—draw the line still closer between the East and West End—arrest a stray sentiment at the corner of a street, relegate elegance to a fashionable square—annihilate all other enjoyments, all other pretensions, but those of their employers—reduce the bulk of mankind to a cipher, and make all but a few pampered favourites of fortune dissatisfied with themselves and contemptible to one another. The reader's mind is so varnished over with affectation that not an avenue to truth or feeling is left open, and it is stifled for want of breath. Send these people across the Channel who make such a fuss about the East and West End, and no one can find out the difference. The English are not a nation of *dandies*; nor can John Bull afford (whatever the panders to fashion and admirers of courtly graces may say to the contrary) to rest all his pretensions upon that. He must descend to a broader and more manly level to keep his ground at all. Those who would persuade him to build up his fame on frogged coats or on the embellishments of a snuff-box, he should scatter with one loud roar of indignation and trample into the earth like grasshoppers, as making not only a beast but an ass of him.

A writer of this accomplished stamp comes forward to tell you, not how his hero feels on any occasion—for he is above that—but how he was dressed, and makes him a mere lay-figure of fashion with a few pert, current phrases in his mouth. The Sir Sedley Clarendels and Meadowsees of a former age are become the real fine gentlemen of this. Then he gives you the address of his heroine's milliner, lest any shocking surmise should arise in your mind of the possibility of her dealing with a person of less approved taste, and also informs you that the quality eat fish with silver forks. This is all he knows about the matter: is this all they feel? The fact is new to him: it is old to them. It is so new to him and he is so delighted with it, that, provided a few select persons eat fish with silver forks, he considers it a circumstance of no consequence if a whole country starves: but these privileged persons are not surely thinking all the time and every day of their lives of that which Mr. Theodore Hook has never forgotten since he first witnessed it, viz., that *they eat their fish with a silver fork*. What, then, are they thinking of in their intervals of leisure—what are their feelings that *we* can be supposed to know nothing of? Will Mr. Theodore Hook, who is "comforted with their bright radiance, though not in their sphere," condescend to give us a glimpse of these, that we may admire their real elegance

and refinement as much as he does a frogged coat or silver fork? It is cruel in him not to do so. "The *Court*, as well as we, may chide him for it." He once criticised a city feast with great minuteness and bitterness, in which (as it appears) the sideboard is ill-arranged, the footman makes a blunder, the cook has sent up a dish too little or too highly seasoned. Something is wanting, as Mr. Hook insinuates is necessarily the case whenever people in the neighbourhood of Russell Square give dinners. But that something is not the manners or conversation of gentlemen—this never enters his head—but something that the butler, the cook, or the valet of people of fashion could have remedied quite as well (to say the least) as their masters. It is here the cloven foot, the under-bred tone, the undue admiration of external circumstances, breaks out and betrays the writer. Mr. Hook has a fellow-feeling with low life, or rather with vulgarity aping gentility, but he has never got beyond the outside of what he calls *good society*. He can lay the cloth or play the buffoon after dinner—but that is the utmost he can pretend to. We have in "Sayings and Doings" and in "Vivian Grey" abundance of Lady Marys and Lady Dorotheys, but they are titles without characters, or the blank is filled up with the most trite impertinence. So a young linen-draper or attorney's clerk from the country, who had gained a thirty thousand pound prize in the lottery and wished to set up for a fine gentleman, might learn from these novels what hotel to put up at, what watering-place to go to, what hatter, hosier, tailor, shoemaker, *friseur*, to employ, what part of the town he should be seen in, what theatre he might frequent; but how to behave, speak, look, feel, or think in his new and more aspiring character he would not find the most distant hint in the gross caricatures or flimsy sketches of the most mechanical and shallow of all schools. It is really as if, in lieu of our royal and fashionable "Society of Authors," a deputation of tailors, cooks, lackeys, had taken possession of Parnassus, and had appointed some Abigail out of place perpetual Secretary. The Congreves, Wycherleys, and Vanbrughs of former days gave us some taste of gentility and courtly refinement in their plays: enchanted us with their *Millamants*, or made us bow with respect to their *Lord Townleys*. It would seem that the race of these is over, or that our modern scribes have not had access to them on a proper footing—that is, not for their talents or conversation, but as mountebanks or political drudges.

At first it appears strange that persons of so low a station in life should be seized with such a rage to inveigh against themselves, and make us despise all but a few arrogant people, who pay them ill for what they do. But this is the natural process of servility, and we



see all valets and hangers-on of the Great do the same thing. The powdered footman looks down on the rabble that dog his master's coach as beneath his notice. He feels the one little above him, and the other (by consequence) infinitely below him. Authors at present would be thought gentlemen, as gentlemen have a fancy to turn authors. The first thing a *dandy scribbler* does is to let us know he is dressed in the height of the fashion (otherwise we might imagine him some miserable garreteer, distinguished only by his poverty and learning)—and the next thing he does is to make a supercilious allusion to some one who is not so well dressed as himself. He then proceeds to give us a sparkling account of his Champagne and of his box at the Opera. A newspaper hack of this description also takes care to inform us that the people at the Opera in general, the Mr. Smiths and the Mr. Browns, are not good enough for him, and that he shall wait to begin his critical lucubrations till the stars of fashion meet there in crowds and constellations! At present it should seem that a seat on Parnassus conveys a title to a box at the Opera, and that Helicon no longer runs water, but Champagne. Literature, so far from supplying us with intellectual resources to counterbalance immediate privations, is made an instrument to add to our impatience and irritability under them, and to nourish our feverish, childish admiration of external show and grandeur. This rage for fashion and for fashionable writing seems becoming universal, and some stop must be put to it, unless it cures itself by its own excessive folly and insipidity. . . .

[*Sketches and Essays (now first collected by his Son)*—1839. This volume consists of Essays contributed to various periodicals, but not previously published in a collective form. It may be regarded as a continuation of *Table-Talk* and *The Plain Speaker*.]

### ON READING NEW BOOKS.

“And what of this new book, that the whole world make such a rout about?”—STERNE.

I CANNOT understand the rage manifested by the greater part of the world for reading New Books. If the public had read all those that have gone before, I can conceive how they should not wish to read the same work twice over; but when I consider the countless volumes that lie unopened, unregarded, unread, and unthought of, I cannot enter into the pathetic complaints that I hear made that

Sir Walter writes no more—that the press is idle—that Lord Byron is dead. If I have not read a book before, it is, to all intents and purposes, new to me, whether it was printed yesterday or three hundred years ago. If it be urged that it has no modern, passing incidents, and is out of date and old-fashioned, then it is so much the newer; it is farther removed from other works that I have lately read, from the familiar routine of ordinary life, and makes so much more addition to my knowledge. But many people would as soon think of putting on old armour as of taking up a book not published within the last month, or year at the utmost. There is a fashion in reading as well as in dress, which lasts only for the season. One would imagine that books were, like women, the worse for being old; that they have a pleasure in being read for the first time; that they open their leaves more cordially; that the spirit of enjoyment wears out with the spirit of novelty; and that, after a certain age, it is high time to put them on the shelf. This conceit seems to be followed up in practice. What is it to me that another—that hundreds or thousands have in all ages read a work? Is it on this account the less likely to give me pleasure, because it has delighted so many others? Or can I taste this pleasure by proxy? Or am I in any degree the wiser for their knowledge? Yet this might appear to be the inference. *Their* having read the work may be said to act upon us by sympathy, and the knowledge which so many other persons have of its contents deadens our curiosity and interest altogether. We set aside the subject as one on which others have made up their minds for us (as if we really could have ideas in their heads), and are quite on the alert for the next new work, teeming hot from the press, which we shall be the first to read, criticise, and pass an opinion on. Oh, delightful! To cut open the leaves, to inhale the fragrance of the scarcely dry paper, to examine the type to see who is the printer (which is some clue to the value that is set upon the work), to launch out into regions of thought and invention never trod till now, and to explore characters that never met a human eye before—this is a luxury worth sacrificing a dinner-party or a few hours of a spare morning to. Who, indeed, when the work is critical and full of expectation, would venture to dine out, or to face a coterie of blue-stockings in the evening, without having gone through his ordeal, or at least without hastily turning over a few of the first pages, while dressing, to be able to say that the beginning does not promise much, or to tell the name of the heroine?

A new work is something in our power; we mount the bench, and sit in judgment on it; we can damn or recommend it to others at pleasure can decry or extol it to the skies and can give an answer

to those who have not yet read it and expect an account of it ; and thus show our shrewdness and the independence of our taste before the world have had time to form an opinion. If we cannot write ourselves, we become, by busying ourselves about it, a kind of *accessories after the fact*. Though not the parent of the bantling that “has just come into this breathing world, scarce half made up,” without the aid of criticism and puffing, yet we are the gossips and foster-nurses on the occasion, with all the mysterious significance and self-importance of the tribe. If we wait, we must take our report from others ; if we make haste, we may dictate ours to them. It is not a race, then, for priority of information, but for precedence in tattling and dogmatising. The work last out is the first that people talk and inquire about. It is the subject on the *tapis*—the cause that is pending. It is the last candidate for success (other claims have been disposed of), and appeals for this success to us, and us alone. Our predecessors can have nothing to say to this question, however they may have anticipated us on others ; future ages, in all probability, will not trouble their heads about it ; we are the panel. How hard, then, not to avail ourselves of our immediate privilege to give sentence of life or death—to seem in ignorance of what every one else is full of—to be behindhand with the polite, the knowing, and fashionable part of mankind—to be at a loss and dumb-founded, when all around us are in their glory, and figuring away, on no other ground than that of having read a work that we have not ! Books that are to be written hereafter cannot be criticised by us ; those that were written formerly have been criticised long ago ; but a new book is the property, the prey of ephemeral criticism, which it darts triumphantly upon ; there is a raw, thin air of ignorance and uncertainty about it, not filled up by any recorded opinion ; and curiosity, impertinence, and vanity rush eagerly into the vacuum. A new book is the fair field for petulance and coxcombry to gather laurels in—the butt set up for roving opinion to aim at. Can we wonder, then, that the circulating libraries are besieged by literary dowagers and their granddaughters when a new novel is announced ? That mail-coach copies of the *Edinburgh Review* are or were coveted ? That the manuscript of the Waverley Romances is sent abroad in time for the French, German, or even Italian translation to appear on the same day as the original work, so that the longing Continental public may not be kept waiting an instant longer than their fellow-readers in the English metropolis, which would be as tantalising and insupportable as a little girl being kept without her new frock, when her sister’s is just come home and is the talk and admiration of every one in

the house? To be sure, there is something in the taste of the times; a modern work is expressly adapted to modern readers. It appeals to our direct experience, and to well-known subjects; it is part and parcel of the world around us, and is drawn from the same sources as our daily thoughts. There is, therefore, so far, a natural or habitual sympathy between us and the literature of the day, though this is a different consideration from the mere circumstance of novelty. An author now alive has a right to calculate upon the living public; he cannot count upon the dead, nor look forward with much confidence to those that are unborn. Neither, however, is it true that we are eager to read all new books alike; we turn from them with a certain feeling of distaste and distrust, unless they are recommended to us by some peculiar feature or obvious distinction. Only young ladies from the boarding-school or milliners' girls read all the new novels that come out. It must be spoken of or against; the writer's name must be well known or a great secret; it must be a topic of discourse and a mark for criticism—that is, it must be likely to bring us into notice in some way—or we take no notice of it. There is a mutual and tacit understanding on this head. We can no more read all the new books that appear than we can read all the old ones that have disappeared from time to time. A question may be started here, and pursued as far as needful, whether, if an old and worm-eaten manuscript were discovered at the present moment, it would be sought after with the same avidity as a new and hot-pressed poem or other popular work? Not generally, certainly, though by a few with perhaps greater zeal. For it would not affect present interests, or amuse present fancies, or touch on present manners, or fall in with the public *egotism* in any way; it would be the work either of some obscure author—in which case it would want the principle of excitement—or of some illustrious name, whose style and manner would be already familiar to those most versed in the subject, and his fame established; so that, as a matter of comment and controversy, it would only go to account on the old score; there would be no room for learned feuds and heart-burnings. . . .

I have been often struck by the unreasonableness of the complaint we constantly hear of the ignorance and barbarism of former ages, and the folly of restricting all refinement and literary elegance to our own. We are, indeed, indebted to the ages that have gone before us, and could not well do without them. But in all ages there will be found still others that have gone before with nearly equal lustre and advantage, though, by distance and the intervention of multiplied excellence, this lustre may be dimmed or forgotten. Had, it then, no existence? We might, with the same reason, sup-



